

PLAYS
for
MERRY ANDREWS

By
ALFRED KREYMBORG



NEW YORK, THE SUNWISE TURN
1920

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VOTE THE NEW MOON



A Toy Play

*To John Reed and Louise Bryant:
In return for a mere Russian picture postcard.*

VOTE THE NEW MOON

A Toy Play



CHARACTERS

THE TOWN CRIER

BURGHER

BURGESS

CANDIDATE BLUE

CANDIDATE RED

THE CATFISH



The stage is dark and noiseless . . . suddenly, a sound . . . like the sound of a stealthy step . . . suddenly, another . . . like the sound of a crier's bell . . . suddenly, a third . . . the sound of his song . . .

Burgher and Burgess of this town—
dark has been dark entirely too long—
dark has been dark since the old moon
fell—

a-flung to the river and a-gobbled by the
Fish!

Burgher and Burgess—return from your
snooze—

a moon helped us ever to see in the dark!—
snooze too long and you'll snooze your
sight away!—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

a burg is blind sans burgomaster!
You know I'm not an alliterative pun-
ster!—
the affairs of this realm are so close to my
heart,
my heart's all a-riddle and a-riddle will
remain,
till you wake this election and vote the
new moon!

*Light comes suddenly . . . behold a
town-crier . . . who looks like a scarecrow . . . or a
rag-doll . . . the stage is bare . . . but, like a magic
property-man, he makes mathematic passes . . . and
behold, in accordance with his next address, delivered with
mysterious gusto . . . a sequence of building-blocks
. . . beginning with a gate . . .*

You wouldn't be there, and I wouldn't be
here—

if this were not a play, and it did not have
a plot—so:

Here I stand at the gate to our town—
let me step inside and prove it such—so!
Presto, a house—a-painted blue—
belongs to our Burgher—you'll see him
anon!

Presto, another—a-painted red—
belongs to our Burgess—you'll see him
too!

Prestissimo, a third—a-painted like the
first—

belongs to one candidate — Candidate
Blue!

VOTE THE NEW MOON

Prestissimo, a fourth—a-painted like the
second—
belongs to his rival—Candidate Red!
The fifth house—summit!—with the belfry
a-top—
that's the town-hall where burgomasters
dwell—
hark ye, it's been empty, since we slew the
last—
look down the lane, and you'll see a purple
strip—
the mystic little stream where we throw
them when they're through—
ex-burgomasters and defeated candidates!—
wherein Red or Blue, this day, is gobbled
by the Fish—
our longitudinous, latitudinous, altitudi-
nous God—
half of Him Cat, half of Him Fish,
half of Him fur, half of Him scales,
half of Him earth, half of Him water—
half of Him life—the other half—death!!
This isn't moonlight—it's mornlight, or
dawn!—
later, when the vote begins, the dark will
return—
then—suddenly—as sudden as a sword—
what looks like a belfry will look like a
moon—
red or blue the color—and the dark dis-
appear!
Burgher, always for the blue, Burgess for

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

the red—

woe, if they vote no moon—oblivion would
come! . . .

Burgher and Burgess of this town—
dark has been dark everlastingly long—
wake—it's election day—vote your new
moon!

One for the blue—oh—one for the red!

He raps on the Citizens' doors . . .

*after a pause, Burgher and Burgess pop out . . .
like Jacks-in-the-box . . . the one in blue, the other
in red . . . they look woefully thin and sleepy . . .
their responses are categorical . . .*

CRIER — Morrow—Burgher—what means this tar-
 diness?

BURGHER — It means what it means—

CRIER — Morrow—Burgess—why this laggard air?

BURGESS — It means what it means—

CRIER — Dolts—do you know what day this is?

DUO — We—do—

CRIER — Oafs—aware how great it is?

DUO — We—are—

CRIER — Sensible of the need of it?

DUO — We—are—

CRIER — Would you feel the loss of it?

DUO — We—would—

CRIER — How would you feel the loss of it?

BURGHER — We wouldn't—

BURGESS — Be able to see—

CRIER — Would you like a loss like that?

DUO — We—would—

CRIER — You—would?

VOTE THE NEW MOON

DUO — We—would—
CRIER — Louts — loons — blockheads — how dare
you?—
are you deaf?—deaf with sleep?—repeat!
Would you like a loss like that?

DUO — We—wouldn't—
CRIER — Again—louder!
DUO — We—wouldn't—
CRIER — Are you ready for the vote?—pinch your-
selves!

DUO — We—are—
CRIER — Scratch your heads—kick yourselves!
DUO — We—are—
CRIER — Then where are your party flags?—flown?
—eh?

DUO — Oh!
CRIER — Oh!
*Two pennants . . . a blue and a red
. . . wriggle up the Citizens' flag-poles . . . flutter
at the tops . . .*

CRIER — Where are your party hammers?—eh?—
oh?

DUO — Oh!
CRIER — Oh!
*Hammers . . . harmless as to size
. . . appear in each right hand. . .*

CRIER — Will you vote as always?
DUO — We—will—
CRIER — You, Burgher, vote for Blue?
BURGHER — I—will—glory to the moon!
CRIER — You, Burgess, vote for Red?
BURGESS — I—will—glory to the moon!

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

CRIER — Citizens—lift the hammer! Higher!—
still higher!—don't smite yet!—attention!
They had begun to rap each other, automatically, on the head . . .

First let me hear your lilt—
years are years—and old as you are—
age as sleepy and stupid as yours—
habit, itself, forgets itself—now!

BURGHER — One for the blue—

BURGESS — One for the red—

CRIER — Good!

BURGHER — One for the blue—

BURGESS — One for the red—

CRIER — That will do—

BURGHER — One for the blue—

BURGESS — One for the—

CRIER — That—will—do!

Now—face each other—are you ready?

DUO — We—are—

ready for the moon—

CRIER — Citizens—beware—vote honestly!

They rap and vote . . . 'one for the blue, one for the red' . . . but as they proceed, their strokes and voices grow feebler . . . meantime, the Crier, nodding to the drowsy tempo, has brought his attention back to the audience . . .

One for the blue—one for the red—you
hear,

good folk—we shall soon see our moon—
you see—special interest is felt in this
hour—

in that we've had up to the present hour—

VOTE THE NEW MOON

one for the blue—one for the red—
we've had up to the present era of our
realm,
seventy-two blue moons and seventy-two
red!—

so that particular interest invades this particular election—

one for the blue—one for the red—
insofar as it will determine definitely and
irrevocably—

not alone who shall be our new burgo-
master—

but which shall be our seventy-third!—
which definite and irrevocable decision is
elicited,

you see—by the simplest, the most naive
process in history—

of—one for the blue—one for the red—
of citizen smiting citizen on the head—
until one or the other falls insensible—

Accidentally, drowsily, somehow or other

. . . the Citizens reverse their votes . . .

BURGHER — One for the red—

BURGESS — One for the blue—

CRIER — What's that?—am I too falling asleep?—

BURGHER — One for the red—

CRIER — In consequence of this indigenous phenom-
enon—

to which Solon himself would have bent
homage—

BURGESS — One for the blue—

CRIER — Am I dreaming?—excuse me while I listen!

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

*The Citizens are no longer drowsy . . .
they have stopped hammering . . . their voices, under
the strange influence of the transposition of motives, have
grown impudent . . .*

BURGHER — One for the red—

BURGESS — One for the blue—

CRIER — Bones of dead moonbeams—
what treachery is this?

*The Citizens stop tilting and face front
. . . the hammers fall to the ground . . .*

CRIER — Blood of the sacred stream—
what regicide is this?

Burgher—what do you mean by, one for
the red—

Burgess—you, by, one for the blue?

BURGHER — I mean—

BURGESS — I mean—

CRIER — What do you mean?

BURGHER — We mean—

BURGESS — We're tired—

CRIER — Tired?

BURGHER — Of old moons—

BURGESS — We want—

CRIER — You want?—

DUO — A new moon!

CRIER — Clowns—you'll have a new moon?

DUO — We'll not!

CRIER — Aren't you voting for one?

DUO — We're not!

CRIER — This is perplexing—amazing—dumfound-
ing!

Dotards—what then are you voting for?

VOTE THE NEW MOON

- DUO — The same old moon—
BURGHER — A blue moon—
BURGESS — Or a red—
CRIER — You two are in league—
you want a change?—ha!
Burgher—you want a red now—
Burgess—you a blue?
How would that be a change?
DUO — It wouldn't—
CRIER — Then you don't want a change?—
Imbeciles—what do you want?—
DUO — A change
CRIER — Ha—numbskulls—idiots—dissemblers—
elucidate yourselves—your do and don't—
spit it out—or I'll march you down the
lane—
into the river—into the Fish!
DUO — Br!
CRIER — Ha—begin!
*Hiding behind each other in turn and nudg-
ing each other with secret encouragement . . . they
speak . . . with an obviousness bordering on mys-
tery, an innocence on roguery . . .*
BURGHER — Cheese, though it melt, will always be
cheese—
BURGESS — Milk left standing too long always turns
sour—
BURGHER — A dog with four legs always runs on four
legs—
BURGESS — An arm is always as long as it reaches—
CRIER — This is cataclysmic—what does it mean?
DUO — It means what it means—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

BURGHHER — If hair falls out, a head grows bald—
BURGESS — A knife cuts bread, it doesn't cut water—
CRIER — Ah—I begin to see—you're tired?
DUO — We're tired—
CRIER — Tired of the old ways?—
DUO — Old way—
CRIER — Old moons?—
DUO — Old moon—
CRIER — Laws, customs, routine?—
DUO — Old everything!
CRIER — I perceive your abracadabra—
DUO — You—do?
CRIER — Hm!
DUO — Hm?
CRIER — Hm!

The Crier needs more than a moment's reflection . . . shakes his head . . . suddenly, he flaps his sides like a rooster, and then raps at the doors of the Candidates . . . after a pause, they issue forth, dressed respectively in blue and red . . . although they also look like Jacks-in-the-box, they have apparently more dignity than the Citizens . . . but like them, they appear woefully thin and sleepy . . .

BLUE — Which of us—wins?
RED — Which of us—dies?
CRIER — Neither!
DUO — Neither?
CRIER — The vote was interrupted—
BLUE — Then why—are we called?
RED — An astonishing—precedent surely—
BLUE — Never heard of before—
RED — Nor written either—

VOTE THE NEW MOON

BLUE — It's not—in the charter—
RED — The laws—statutes—decrees—
CRIER — Silence—debate comes later—
attention first to the rigmarole!
BLUE — The—rigmarole?
RED — On—election day?
BLUE — Never heard of before—
RED — Nor written either—
DUO — It's illegal!
CRIER — Silence—heed the official oath—
strike your traditional poses and paces,
as if it weren't election—now!
*The Candidates adhere to the methodical pos-
tures and movements required by the rigmarole . . .*
CRIER— Make of your lips
a hard straight line;
parallel with them your eyes;
make of your cheeks and chin
two strict right angles,
and of your ears and nose
two more;
have the part in your hair
diameter your head,
forehead, nose, lips and chin;
stick your arms
to your thorax and thighs.
Have your legs move,
since move they must,
in imperceptible perpendiculars,
like hidden two-four pendulums.
And some day,
so dignified a structure

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

will be hailed,
Burgomaster!
BLUE — Now then!
RED — Let us crawl back to bed!
CRIER — Sirrahs!
RED — I'm so sleepy—
BLUE — So am I—
RED — No hour to call a candidate—
BLUE — It's too early—not yet dark—
CRIER — Precisely!
DUO — Precisely?
CRIER — Cease your prate—while I disclose—
this most stupendous—most stupefying—
this super-superlative phenomenon!
DUO — Eh?
CRIER — Eye those two culprits—do you know
them?
DUO — We—do!
CRIER — Do you recall haranguing them?
BLUE — Many a time—
RED — And often!
CRIER — What has been ever and always
the cause for your haranguing them?
DUO — The—vote!
CRIER — Which vote?
DUO — The vote for me!
CRIER — Now, politic sirs—
do you admit the following items?
Dark is dark without a moon?
DUO — We—do!
CRIER — A burg is blind sans burgomaster?
DUO — We—do!

VOTE THE NEW MOON

CRIER — What elects the burgomaster?
DUO — The—vote!
CRIER — Who select the vote?
DUO — The—voters!
CRIER — And who and what elect the moon?
DUO — I—do—
by vote of the voters!
CRIER — How do you attain this dignity?
BLUE — Through numerical superiority—
RED — And the smiting insensible!
CRIER — Gaze upon yon twain!
*They do so . . . with a heightening
consciousness of the situation . . .*
CRIER — Have you gazed?
DUO — We—have!
CRIER — Do you begin to discover the prodigy?
DUO — We—don't!
CRIER — Dolts—gaze again—steadfastly—
do you recognize yon twain?
DUO — Most adorable constituent—
BLUE — Burgher mine—
RED — Burgess mine—
CRIER — No longer yours!
DUO — Eh?
CRIER — Candidate Blue—
do you see Burgess insensible?
BLUE — Alas—I do not!
CRIER — What does that mean?
BLUE — It means—I lose—I die—
CRIER — It does not!
BLUE — Eh?
CRIER — Candidate Red—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

do you see Burgher insensible?
RED — I do not—ah me!
CRIER — What does that mean?
RED — It means—I lose—I die—
CRIER — It does not!
RED — Eh?
CRIER — Addle-pates—
it means—they haven't voted—
BLUE — To be sure—
RED — It's too early—
BLUE — Not yet dark—
CRIER — It means—they have refused to vote—
DUO — Refused?
CRIER — Burgher refuses to vote for Blue—
BLUE — Burgher!
CRIER — Burgess refuses to vote for Red—
RED — Burgess!
CRIER — Contrariwise—
Burgher refuses to turn to Red—
RED — Burgher!
CRIER — Burgess refuses to turn to Blue—
BLUE — Burgess!
CRIER — Do I speak truth—demogrades?
CITIZENS — You do!
BLUE — Amazing—
RED — Dumfounding—
CRIER — That's what I said—now—
it means furthermore—
DUO — Furthermore?
CRIER — That ye twain are to blame—
DUO — We—are?
CRIER — Your haranguing's to blame—was—

VOTE THE NEW MOON

it was non-sufficient—non-alluring—
non-sufficient to sway the hearts of two
dolts—

non-alluring towards the votes of two
dolts—

dolts can't move dolts!

DUO — Eh?

CRIER — Citizens—do I speak further truth?

DUO — You do!

BLUE — My haranguing—

RED — My eloquence—

BLUE — My silvery phraseology—

RED — My golden rhodomontade—

BLUE — Inspirational of ages past—

RED — Polished, beautified, perfected—

BLUE — Non-sufficient?

RED — Non-alluring?

CRIER — Precisely!

DUO — What does it signify?

CRIER — It signifies—and grievous the signifi-
cation—

you'll have to harangue all over again!

QUARTETTE — Bones of dead moonbeams!

CRIER — Would you have dark remain dark?

QUARTETTE — Br!

CRIER — Would you have oblivion come?

QUARTETTE — Br!!

CRIER — Would you have the sacred stream—
and the sacred purple Catfish—

QUARTETTE — Br!!!

CRIER — You begin to look like eels—
nocturnal, toothsome eels?

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

- Shall the Catfish gobble you?
- QUARTETTE — Br!!!
- CRIER — Gaze upon the belfry—
it is empty, is it not?
Citizens—do you want to see a new
 moon?—
even a dainty sliver of a moon?
- DUO — We do!
- CRIER — Candidates—do you, too, want to see—
- DUO — We do!
- CRIER — All ensemble—do you want to see—
- QUARTETTE — We do!!
- CRIER — How will you—and when?
- CANDIDATES — By haranguing—
- CITIZENS — By voting!
- CRIER — Paladins of this, our realm—gird your
 tongues—
retainers of this, our realm—your ears!
Do you gird?
- QUARTETTE — We do!!
- CRIER — Speak—great spellbinders!
 Wearily, the Candidates make the effort of
speaking . . . warily, the Citizens, the effort of listen-
ing . . . the Crier furtively watching the latter . . .
- BLUE — I come to you to-day—
- RED — I come to you this day—
- BLUE — With a profound appeal to your discrimi-
 nation—
- RED — With the lofty purpose of lifting your
 thoughts on high—
- BLUE — With the special intention of nobly cate-
 chising you—

VOTE THE NEW MOON

RED — Towards the duties and pleasures of the
honored—

BLUE — In the duties and joys of those conferring
honor—

RED — I who come to you this day—

BLUE — On me who come to you to-day—

DUO — In behalf of the new-moon-to-be—

RED — The red moon—

BLUE — The blue moon!

They glare at each other momentarily . . .
like skinny dogs closing over the same old bone . . .

BURGHER (*sotto voce*) — It's they who are in league!

BURGESS (*ditto*) — They who conspire!

BURGHER — Each speaks like t'other—

BURGESS — Each mouths like t'other—

CRIER — Silence—babblers!

CANDIDATES — Eh?

CRIER — Not ye—continue—majestic your orations!

BLUE — It is difficult—

RED — Very difficult—

BLUE — I've always spoken alone—to Burgher
alone—

RED — I alone to Burgess alone!
This is sorely non-customary—

BLUE — Non-conformative—

RED — Unwritten—

BLUE — Unspoken—

CRIER — Ye are noble as swans—
sailing down-stream—
sailing to victory—sailing to death—

RED — I don't mind dying—

BLUE — I've done it before—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

- RED — I mind not sleeping—
- BLUE — Not finishing sleeping—
- BURGHHER — Fraudulent—
- BURGESS — Frauds—
- CRIER — Silence—rabble!
- CANDIDATES — Eh?
- CRIER — Not ye—continue—inflate your perorations!
- RED — I need hardly testify—
- BLUE — Quite superfluous the occasion—
- RED — That the moon I glorify—
- BLUE — Of celebrating the personality—
- RED — That all-seeing crimson semi-circle—
- BLUE — Of the all-cleaving azure scimitar—
- RED — Infesting all-dark with all-light—
- BLUE — Hewing, slashing all-black with all-white—
- RED — Incontestably bringing day to your night—
- BLUE — Bedecking your heads with splinters so bright—
- BURGHHER — You hear?—
- BURGESS — How they rhyme?—
- CANDIDATES — And making manifest to you—
They stop and glower at each other . . .
- try to glower . . .*
- RED — The potency of rouge — impotence of bluish—
- BLUE — Eh, of sapphire, turquoise, lapis lazuli?—
 impotence of pinkish!—
- RED — Eh, of scarlet, carbuncle, flush of the rose?—
- BLUE — Flush of the tomato!—
- RED — Red which brings blushes to women—

VOTE THE NEW MOON

love and desire to men?—

BLUE — Blue which kindles the eyes of women—
kindles the veins of men?—

RED — Blue which you taste in milk, half water?—

BURGHHER — Milk left standing too long turns to
water—

BLUE — Burgher! I'm aghast!

BURGESS — Red sunsets are made of dead dawns—

RED — Burgess! I'm smitten!

CANDIDATES — What does this mean?

CRIER — Louder, mates—harangue them—silence
them—
deafen them—deaden them!—

CANDIDATES — Damn them!

CITIZENS — Damn *them*!

CANDIDATES — Damn them to the moon—

CITIZENS — Damn *them* to the moon—

CANDIDATES — Damn them to the river—

CITIZENS — Damn them to the Catfish—

CANDIDATES — Oh, damn the Catfish!—

CRIER — Mutiny—insurrection—revolution—
homicide—fratricide—patricide!—
sacred purple Cat—sacred purple Fish—
pardon—mercy—mercy—pardon!—

QUARTETTE — Damn the Catfish!!

CRIER — Sacrilege!!
Immediately . . . from the river
. . . there comes an ominous crescendo . . . swish
. . . swish . . . flop . . .

QUARTETTE — What was that?

CRIER — Save yourselves—
harangue—vote—vote—harangue—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

or vengeance will fall!—
 vote—harangue—harangue—vote—
 death and perdition—
 voices—lungs—bellows—roar!
Darkness shrouds the scene . . . a
weird violet light creeps from the river . . . rises
gradually . . . like a spectre . . .
 CRIER — The light—the fumes—
 the dead are rising—
 moons—burgomasters—people—
 the blue—the red—all purple!
 RED — V-vote for the blue moon—
 I m-mean for the red—
 BLUE — V-vote for the red moon—
 I m-mean for the blue—
 CRIER — Blunderers!
 BURGHER — One for the purple—
 BURGESS — One for the purple—
 BURGHER — One for the purple—
 BURGESS — One for the purple—
 CRIER — Blasphemers!—
 an evil spirit's got you!—
 Fish—mercy—pardon—
 CANDIDATES — V-vote for the Fish!—
 CITIZENS — One for the purple—
 One for the purple—
 The sound of hammer blows grows louder,
more rapid . . . din . . . clatter . . . groans
 . . .
 CRIER — Burgher—Burgess—
 smite each *other*!—not them!—
 each other!—can't you see?

VOTE THE NEW MOON

BURGHES— Die, dog!—
CRIER — Burgher—
 you've killed him—
 your man—your moon—
BURGHES — And I'll gobble him!—
BURGES — Die, dog!—
CRIER — Burgess—
 you've killed him—
 your man—your moon—
BURGES — I'll devour him!
CRIER — I hear crunching of bones!—
 help—murder—cannibals—ghouls!—
 Burgher's swallowed Blue—Burgess,
 Red!
 now they're eating each other!!—
BURGHES — Crunch for the purple—
BURGES — Crunch for the purple—
CRIER — Speak—Burgher—Burgess—
 which is it?
 which swallowed which?—
CATFISH (*in sepulchral tone*) — The—Fish!!
 I—swallowed—them all!!
CRIER — Monster!—demon!—
 save me!—spare me!!
CATFISH — I'll spare you!
 My belly's full!
 The violet has deepened to purple . . .
 one can now see a huge, misshapen figure . . . four
 times the girth of Candidates and Citizens . . . a com-
 plete purple resemblance . . . with appendages of
 whiskers, fins and tail . . .
CRIER — My Master—King—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

CATFISH — Your—Fate!
Down—dog!
The Crier falls on all fours . . . so
does the Catfish . . .

CATFISH — To the town hall!

CRIER — To the—town—hall!
He crawls to the entrance of the town hall
. . . the Catfish follows pompously . . . the Crier
throws open the door . . . announces . . .

The new B-burgomaster!
The Catfish enters . . . instantly,
a moon appears in the belfry . . . purple
. . . the Crier sees it and rises . . .

The new M-moon!

Purple!

Color of kingship!

Woe!!

A frightful hubbub inside the hall . . .

What does it mean?—

what—is it—now?

He disappears . . . the hubbub ceases
. . . suddenly, the ghostly, terror-stricken face of the
Crier appears in the belfry . . . like a Jack-in-the-box
moon-face profile . . . he pulls the invisible rope, and
the bell tolls . . . more like a dirge, than a paean
. . . he tries to sing-song categorically . . .

H-hark ye—h-hear ye—

the old moon is d-dead—

l-long live—the n-new!!

CURTAIN.

AT THE SIGN OF THUMB AND NOSE



An Unmorality Play

AT THE SIGN OF THE THUMB AND NOSE

An Unmorality Play



AL QUE QUIERE!

Sandpapered with the affection of his ego,
this gentle screed is dedicated by its
author for the scratching of the egos of:

CONRAD AIKEN,
ORRICK JOHNS,
CARL SANDBURG,
WALLACE STEVENS,
WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS—

in distinction of and contradistinction to:

JESSIE AIKEN,
GRACE JOHNS,
LILLIAN SANDBURG,
ELSIE STEVENS,
FLORENCE WILLIAMS,
DOROTHY KREYMBORG—
whom it may concern!

AT THE SIGN OF THE THUMB AND NOSE

An Unmorality Play



CHARACTERS

EGO, the innkeeper.

PROPER }
IMPROPER } twins who desire the same lady.

BELLY, who cannot eat.

LAZY, who cannot dream.

FASTIDIOUS, whose intellect is awry.

LADY, who desires not Proper and Improper.

A small inn, anyhow, anywhere, anytime; bar, with kitchen beyond, through a door; three or four tables; the dingy atmosphere of a cellar; the symbol of the inn over the bar. A door of ingress and egress. Forlorn-looking denizens: Proper and Lazy at one table, with a manuscript between them; Improper and Belly at another, the latter eating and drinking; Fastidious at a third, smoking an aristocratic cheroot; Ego behind the bar, irascibly cleaning mugs and glasses. Their physical attributes, bearing and attire characteristically grotesque. They might be mistaken for gargoyles on a holiday.

The tempo is that of a pompous dynamo rollicking.

PROPER —

Disaster again, good Lazy? Gods of calamity—what is it this time?

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

- LAZY — The same tearful extremity, Proper—
 though a strong phrase or two put to sea
 they'll split on mere commas when
 stupidity blows!
- PROPER — Your compass is clouded, that's all, for
 the nonce—
 wipe it off—still finer phrases will gleam
 like galleons—captain them haven-
 ward!
- I'll be utterly and abysmally undone—
 I told her I'd bring her a poem so
 ethereal,
 breathed upon by my ineffable thought
 of her,
 housed in the safe bark of your well-
 ribbed artistry—
- FASTIDIOUS — Overburdened with adjectives, cavilling
 metaphors—
- IMPROPER — Doddering moonshine, Fastidious—
- BELLY — I can't eat, I can't drink—
- PROPER — I vowed her I'd bring it this night to her
 lattice!
- LAZY — She rejected my others as were she an
 editrice!
- PROPER — The sin was mine, not yours, good
 Lazy—
 Now, this latest and most shimmeringly
 seductive of all the products of my
 love and your invention—
 sends forth fragrance of hyacinths—
- FASTIDIOUS — Exhalation of ineptitude—
- IMPROPER — Stench of chicken entrails—

AT THE SIGN OF THE THUMB AND NOSE

BELLY —	My palate's green, my appetite pink—
PROPER —	Silence, ye!
	The start is so winsome, sweet Lazy—
	lilt it aloud once again,
	and the coda will come of the da capo!
FASTIDIOUS —	No!
IMPROPER —	No!
BELLY —	No!
PROPER —	Master, I appeal to you, Master!
EGO —	Silence, you—with your
	once again, once more, once again!
	You scapegrace, tatterdemalion—
	you and your love and your twin and his
	lust!
IMPROPER —	Master—
EGO —	Silence, you!
	Dupe that I was to raise the latch
	of free hospitality to you twain!
BELLY —	They've soured my stomach so food
	tastes like offal—
FASTIDIOUS —	It has become an impossibility
	for my intellectual apparatus to pursue
	its accustomed mazes—
LAZY —	I cannot dream, cogitate, compose—
EGO —	This tavern is twined and snarled
	with a bedlam of cantankerous idiots—
	this exquisite domicile I erected
	to the repose of liberty, independence,
	selfhood—
FASTIDIOUS —	A place for an impersonal contemplation
	of the interior—
	and a corresponding scorn of the ex-

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

	terior—
BELLY —	I am I and to Hell with all else—
EGO —	Dedicated to the art of being wholly oneself—
FASTIDIOUS —	Regardless of aeons or eternity—
EGO —	Is threatened with destruction by a female!
PROPER —	Is raised to lordhood by a lady—
BELLY —	A bandy-legged she-bitch—
FASTIDIOUS —	Through sexual aberration—
EGO —	The wanting of wantons—
PROPER —	I do <i>not</i> want her—
IMPROPER —	I want <i>her</i> —
PROPER —	I want her for herself— what I can be for her—
IMPROPER —	I want her for myself— what she can be for me—
PROPER —	I want myself for her—
IMPROPER —	Damn herself—I want myself—
LAZY —	Stop them, Master—
BELLY —	They're belching again—
FASTIDIOUS —	Their rondo deafens me—
PROPER —	She'd love me if it weren't for him—
IMPROPER —	I'd have her if it weren't for him—
EGO —	Silence, you two—and silence, you three!
	Give heed while I lilt my dainty screed, undistrubed by ship-wrecking semi- colons!
	Fancy my faith and the labor I've con- secrated being smirched by heretic slammerkins—

AT THE SIGN OF THE THUMB AND NOSE

I'll clean you two mugs or throw you to
the gutter!

Fancy the I being touched by the
thought of a you, whether woman,
world, time or the gods themselves!

Have your hearts turned to cows, your
senses to milking?

I'll be fair with you two, and you
three—

I'll rehearse our credo judicially, little
though you deserve it! Attention
to the catechism!

To what are we canonized?

THE COMPANY — The self!

EGO — Proper, what is the self?

PROPER — The right to individuality and the ex-
pression thereof.

EGO — Improper, how is this right manifested?

IMPROPER — What the I feels, thinks or wants,
the I is free to feel, think or want—
regardless of neighbors.

EGO — Neighbors, ah—and what are neighbors,
Lazy?

LAZY — Any body or thing which isn't the I,
and—

FASTIDIOUS — Any body or thing which interferes
with the I!

EGO — You needn't respond, Fastidious—
you're conscience itself in our midst!
Belly, how does the self premonstrate in
you?

BELLY — I maintain a stomach, and ways to that

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

stomach—
they are hungry—I eat and drink—
the stomach and its ways go back to
sleep!

EGO — Lazy, how premonstrate in you?
LAZY — If I do not dream, there's no concern for
 the morrow,
 without which concern for the morrow,
 to-day dies!

EGO — Cleverly vocalized—and you, Fastid-
 ious—

EGO — Brave pragmatist, your job is no simpleton's!

IMPROPER — I've no teeth for masticating theories—
 PROPER — Nor I!

IMPROPER — The self remonstrates in me—
my blood's a torrent with it—my senses
 wild hounds—
the flesh I crave has the shape of a
 woman—

PROPER — A being more vaporous than perfume—
to whom I pray as were she a goddess,
to whom I shall throw my carcass,
impediment of my spirit—

AT THE SIGN OF THE THUMB AND NOSE

- as sacrifice of my self to her self—
- EGO — Sacrelegists!
- PROPER — Would you have us ape what we no longer believe?
- EGO — Conspirators!
- IMPROPER — Ape the sanctimonious, like Fastidious?
- FASTIDIOUS — Sirrah!
- EGO — Infidels—atheists—
- PROPER — Freethinkers—
- IMPROPER — Latitudinarians!
- Ego comes forward and stations himself behind Fastidious.*
- EGO — Numskulls—
- how can thought be free, slave to a woman?
- PROPER — I am no longer I—I am she—
- and freer than ever I was in this den!
- IMPROPER — I'll turn her into me—and me into her—
- and be the bigger I for it—
- BELLY — Like a body plus a round fat squab!
- EGO — This is insurrection!
- Wash you two clean or throw you to the gutter?
- I have gentler eloquence for preaching mug-souls!
- He points a piratical six-shooter at the twins and waves it about with humorous carelessness.*
- THE COMPANY — Master, Master!
- PROPER — Spare us—
- IMPROPER — Spare us—
- PROPER — Excellency!
- IMPROPER — Sovereign!

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

- EGO — (*slipping the weapon out of sight*)—
You recall a tune I adore.
I thought you'd forgotten it—
maybe you have! Lazy,
the friendly little air you composed years
ago—
will you beat choir-master?
- LAZY — That was in the days of rhyme, sir!
- FASTIDIOUS — Rhyming was law till you turned icono-
clast!
- THE COMPANY — (*as Lazy beats time*)—
Master Ego, Master Ego,
we are you, and you are we-oh!
- BELLY — I am the body which provideth thee
nourishment—
- FASTIDIOUS — I the cool brain which counseleth thy
flourishment—
- LAZY — I the high bird which wingeth thy
soul—
- THE TWINS — We the harriers which bring thee thy
dole—
- THE COMPANY — Sovereign Ego, Sovereign Ego,
we are you, and you are we-oh!
- FASTIDIOUS — That couplet still smiteth my ear-drum!
- EGO — And now, gentlemen—
setting aside the prerogative of matter
over spirit—
ready as I am to admit my haste in the
introduction of the firearm—
and assuming, instead, that there's a
moiety of excuse for the condition,
and the action consequent thereupon, of

AT THE SIGN OF THE THUMB AND NOSE

our beloved culprits—

LAZY —

Adorable Proper—

BELLY —

Good my-brother Properim—

EGO —

A condition we cannot easily surmise,
so strange is its intrusion in this hallowed
place—

FASTIDIOUS —

Perdition take all non-conformity—

EGO —

Setting aside the firearm as primitive,
primeval—

let us approach this affair with the
beneficent taper of civilized justice.
It is possible our society has grown a
trifle complex.

With complexity, a certain measure of
discomfiture will invade its person.

Elements in themselves are as pure as
little children,

but when elements begin to assert them-
selves—

as is only natural of them under the urge
of self-preservation—

they come into contact with neighbor
elements—

without premeditation, without malice—

FASTIDIOUS —

Wise Master!

THE TWINS —

We love each other—

THE COMPANY —

And thee, Master!

EGO —

In consequence of this disrupting phe-
nomenon,

it behooves me to assume, and to act
directly, not tentatively, on the
assumption,

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

that our law is in need of some slight revision or amendment—

FASTIDIOUS — Not revision or amendment!

EGO — Let me then say, of elongation!

THE COMPANY — Hail, elongation!

EGO — Each in his own way, equally with the rest,

each is an I-am-I—

we revamped that article a moment ago.

But the prime and tragically urgent factor is, it seems now, to wit, that we are living together,

inside the dimensions vouchsafed to one and all

our exquisite amity of the past hid the boundaries of,

dimensions this event has bared like a wound—

so that we become that part which hurts us most—

and must turn physicians for its cure—
or surgeons for its removal—

FASTIDIOUS — You grow involved, wise Master!

EGO — The event thus proves that our being an I-am-I

insinuates relationship to an I-am-you,
from which relationship new evaluations must be suckled.

Proper has expressed a want for an outside entity, whose cognomen we wot not of.

Improper has expressed a want of an

AT THE SIGN OF THE THUMB AND NOSE

opposite tendency, parallel in potency, for the same person.

Diversely, it seems that this foreign entity,

for hindrances best known to her consciousness—

doubtless because she's likewise an I-am-I,

with desires and volitions of her own—

has expressed thus far, so we learn,

as little desire for our twins as they've

vaunted much desire for her—

in fact, none at all!

THE TWINS —

She would if it weren't for him!

EGO —

We've heard that palaver for days now—
hush!

And we've been advised, and painful the

advisement, that Belly cannot eat,

Lazy not finish his verses, Fastidious not

ruminate,

because of the irrelationship of the twins

and this person!

THE COMPANY — Excellency!

EGO —

We made our error at the outset—

like Lazy, we began our poem with

brave phrases

which split on the first rock of disagreement.

Let us begin with a new premise—

and instead of quarreling, instead of re-

verting to firearms, we will agree.

THE COMPANY — Agree?

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

- EGO — Ready to consider contradiction on any paragraph of it, my suggestion is this:
Let Fastidious aid Lazy with Proper's poem!
- FASTIDIOUS — That abominal eschewing of metre and rhyme?
- EGO — Your past and his present will embrace in time—
haven't you revised all his work so far?
Hither, Lazy!
Lazy comes to their table. Fastidious reluctantly makes room for him and the manuscript. They begin revising.
- You, Belly, return to your eating and drinking—
our brains require the cheer of your fuel for devising what we have to devise.
- BELLY — Stuff this porridge down my gullet?
- EGO — I'll bake you a pheasant later!
- BELLY — Chef de cuisine!
- EGO — You, Proper and Improper, prepare yourselves for the combat!
- THE TWINS — Combat?
- EGO — Array yourselves—
make ready the fire of your hearts
and the sagacity of your souls—
for the one last courtship!
- THE TWINS — Last courtship?
- EGO — You are to make her *ours*—
- THE COMPANY — Ours?
- EGO — And failing to make her ours—

AT THE SIGN OF THE THUMB AND NOSE

you are to unmake her *yours*—
you must renounce her!

THE TWINS —

Master!

EGO —

Obedience! I feel the firearm tickling
my ribs!

Which is your choice?

THE TWINS —

Obedience!

EGO —

Gird yourselves!

barbarously.

They do so—Proper daintily, Improper

Go to the lattice of your fair and urge her
thither!

Her I-am-I shall become an I-am-us—
or you return empty-handed!

IMPROPER —

Empty-handed?

EGO —

And never steal forth again in quest of
foreign entities!

Personally, I have no concern
whatsoever,

whether you return full-handed or
empty—

though the maid might amuse me a
tittle.

Are you ready?

PROPER —

One moment more for this crooked
plume!

IMPROPER —

By my blood, I'm ready!

EGO —

And you, Belly—how is the fuel?

BELLY —

The fuel begins to go down.

EGO —

And you, poet and critic—

FASTIDIOUS —

The last line is egregiously banal—

EGO —

Read it, Lazy—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

- LAZY — And my heart lifts and falls to your sun
 and moon!
- EGO — It will do! Give the thing to Proper!
 Proper and Improper—attention—are
 you prepared?
- THE TWINS — Prepared!
- EGO — You may depart.
 They start to leave.
 Stop! Have you forgotten your
 manners?
 Where is the sign?
 With a flourish, they exchange the deb-
onair sign of the inn with the others, Ego alone refraining.
Exeunt Proper and Improper. Pause. Lazy and Fas-
tidious separate; Belly continues to eat; Ego goes towards the
kitchen. Diminuendo ritardando.
- BELLY — Whither wend you, Master?
- EGO — To the kitchen—and the pheasant.
- BELLY — Is it surely a pheasant?
- EGO — While these carping dreamers were
 here—
 it was, patient Belly—
 but now they are gone, it's a goose.
- BELLY — 'Twill do.
 Ego disappears.
- FASTIDIOUS — Illusion's the window-shade
 Nature draws between desire and reality.
- BELLY — Who am I to twist my nose from a goose?
- LAZY — When one is hungry, geese smell like
 myrrh!
- BELLY — When one is hungry, geese smell like
 geese!

AT THE SIGN OF THE THUMB AND NOSE

And I'm hungry again—
blessed that jade who whinnied them
off—

LAZY — The twins? And I can juggle my
thoughts—

I see a monkey—another—another—
where's my parchment?

He rummages in the drawer of a table.

FASTIDIOUS — And that problem which engaged me a
week ago—

was I duelling with a shadow—
did it fear the brawn of my brain—ah!

Sings—

If a rondel and a rondeau give birth to a
child—

they'll give birth to a child, that is cer-
tain.

Mére Rondel touched Père Rondeau—
once on his upper lip, once on his lower—
she'll have a wee child in the fall—

BELLY — (*sings*)—

Pig, swine, boar, hog, sow,
kings of quadruped avoirdupois—
pork, knuckle, ham, bacon, chop—
half of you lean and half of you fat—
you and the butcher keep a biped round!

FASTIDIOUS — Cease thy doggerel!

Sings—

what shall we name the child, queried
Père Rondeau—

what shall we name the child, queried
Mére Rondel?

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

- LAZY — If rondel wed rondeau in all propriety—
The child's name ought to be, Rondelay!
- FASTIDIOUS — You thieving baboon—
- LAZY — (*sings*)—I am four monkeys.
One hangs from a limb,
tail-wise,
chattering at the earth;
another is cramming his belly with
cocoanut;
the third is up in the top branches,
quizzing the sky;
and the fourth—
he's chasing another monkey.
How many monkeys are you?
- BELLY — (*sings*) —
If you press your finger—
be it here or be it there—
I'll give way like a dimpling baby—
take away your finger—
be it here or be it there—
the dimple's gone and I'm baby again!
Oh—I have a pain, a cramp—
something is sticking me!
Crescendo accelerando.
- LAZY — What is it, Belly?
- FASTIDIOUS — I, too—my apparatus is pricked—
the shadow has got me—
- LAZY — There's a tail round my neck—
what is it—oh!
- FASTIDIOUS — It's you and your obscene ditties—
- LAZY — It is they!
- FASTIDIOUS — Who?

AT THE SIGN OF THE THUMB AND NOSE

LAZY — Proper and Improper—
BELLY — They've reached the female brothel—
FASTIDIOUS — Yes, otherwise—
BELLY — My appetite wouldn't be dead—
the goose stinks like a hedgehog—
LAZY — Something terrible is happening—
BELLY — I can feel it—
FASTIDIOUS — I visualize—
LAZY — Master!
FASTIDIOUS — Master!
BELLY — Master!
Ego comes running out.
EGO — What has smitten you now?
LAZY — A calamity—
FASTIDIOUS — A holocaust—
BELLY — The hounds and the bitch—
EGO — What is it?
Oh—I feel it myself—
the scoundrels—what are they doing—
the minx—what is she doing—
something terrible is happening!
THE TRIO — Master—what is it?
Sounds of scuffling without.
LAZY — The twins are fighting—
FASTIDIOUS — She must have banished them—
BELLY — My coin on Improper—
LAZY — Gentle Proper—save him, Master!
FASTIDIOUS — Give them lead!
EGO — *Drawing his pistol—Give them death!*
Proper bursts into the inn, breathless,
waving his arms.

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

- PROPER — Master, Master—save her, Master!
 Improper strides in pompously dragging
the lady by her long golden hair.
- THE COMPANY — Ah!
- EGO — Take your hand from those tresses!
 Improper sees the pistol and obeys.
- LADY — She is dainty, demure—looks about
 wildly—
 Masters!
 She spies Ego—
 Master—save me!
- EGO — *Hiding the pistol and examining Lady—*
 An engaging body and personality!
 You seem to know me, Madam?
- LADY — Spare me those violators!
- EGO — Plural—is there more than one?
- LADY — *Pointing at Proper—*That one, too!
- EGO — Arise, Madam—
 He assists her gallantly.
 Proper assaulted you, too?
- LADY — *Almost simpering—*
 He didn't assault me—
 but—he courted me—
 with sighings—and a poem—
 and prostration of his body—
 and something about, 'this is my last
 protestation'—
 and then that other one—piqued—
 shouting, 'let me show her *my* protesta-
 tion'—
 kicked Proper—knocked him down—
 and seized me!

AT THE SIGN OF THE THUMB AND NOSE

- IMPROPER — If it hadn't been for the one,
the other would have behaved!
Don't blame it on that milksop, hussy—
I need no booby to teach me a-court-
ing—
you and *your* protestation—you're to
blame—
I warned you I'd do it—cave-fashion!
- LADY — Master!
- EGO — Silence, cur!
What is it, Madam?
Come and sit down—repose your fair
being!
- FASTIDIOUS — Being opposes non-being!
- LADY — Who are you?
- FASTIDIOUS — At your service, Madam—
- BELLY — And I'm Belly—can you cook, sweet
mam?
- EGO — Silence, swine!
*He leads Lady to one of the tables, onto
which he raises her, with a chair for footstool.*
- THE COMPANY — Ah!
They crowd forward.
- EGO — Room, slaves!
Your shoe is unbuckled!
He stoops.
- LADY — You are a gentleman, sir. What is your
name?
- EGO — You have named me, Madam.
- LADY — Master—yes—but what your Christian?
- EGO — Fasten your bodice, Love.
- LADY — How do you know my name?

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

- EGO — I know everything.
- LADY — A gentleman—and a seer—what else,
sir?
- EGO — A lover!
- LADY — A lover?
- EGO — Since you came!
- LADY — How exhilarating—
who are you?—
what is your name?
- EGO — Imprison your ringlets again!
- | | | | |
|--------------|---|-------------------|-------------------------|
| FASTIDIOUS — | } | <i>Sotto voce</i> | Banality— |
| LAZY — | | | He's stealing my lines— |
| PROPER — | | | My inspiration— |
| IMPROPER — | | | My property— |
| BELLY — | | | Can she really cook? |
- EGO — Silence, ye!
- LADY — Who are they—what place is this?
- EGO — I'll give them introduction, Wife!
- LADY — Wife?
- THE COMPANY — Wife?
- EGO — Heart of my bosom—
- LADY — Pretty, pretty—
- EGO — Come forward, Improper—kiss Milady's
foot!
- Ego's hand steals to his hip-pocket.*
- Improper obeys.*
- LADY — (*superciliously*)—
Haven't I met you before, sir?
- IMPROPER — You have—and you're meeting me now
—in him!
- LADY — Eh?
- EGO — Come forward, Proper—

AT THE SIGN OF THE THUMB AND NOSE

Proper and the rest imitate Improper in turn.

Sun of my world—
this one is Proper yclept—

LADY — Pretty, pretty—
haven't I met you before, Sir Proper?

PROPER — You have—and you're meeting me now
—in him!

LADY — How mysterious—he speaks like the
other!

EGO — Come forward, Lazy—
this crooked creature's a dreamer—
poem of my life!

LAZY — And my heart lifts and falls to your sun
and moon!

LADY — How intriguing—haven't I heard that
before?

EGO — Imagining, my dear—
let me show you another—
grave Fastidious—thought of my
thought!

FASTIDIOUS — It is not meet for thought to stoop to
matter,
but when thought has matter in its
thought,
thought raises matter on high—and
stoops to it!

LADY — I'm spinning, twirling, whirring—
are you as wise as this one, Master?

EGO — Vanish, Fastidious!
Belly, crawl hither—
earth of my wormhood—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

LADY — What wayward mother christened you?
BELLY — My insides are tickling me—
 they say unto thee—
LADY — Unto me?
BELLY — There's a stench of roast goose in the
 air—
 it offends my intelligence—
 perchance can you bake me a pheasant,
 sweet mam?
LADY — Pheasant—why yes—
 I have pheasants, peacocks and swans
 on my estate!
BELLY — Peacocks and swans!
LADY — And quail which would itch well
 with plums, raisins, rice, cherries and
 sauce of elderberry!
BELLY — Almighty gods—
 you've sent me Ambrosia herself!
EGO — Avaunt, swine!
LADY — Who else now, Master?
EGO — There remains only myself—
 regent of my serfdom!
 My name is Ego.
LADY — And who are you?
EGO — I was I—now I am you!
LADY — What does that mean?
 The henchmen mutter their further dis-
approbation.
FASTIDIOUS — Renegade!
EGO — I am the apex of selfhood,
 of which these slaves are the radii,
 and you the circumference!

AT THE SIGN OF THE THUMB AND NOSE

- FASTIDIOUS — Whom does he call slave?
LADY — Only the circumference?
EGO — You are the center of gravity
toward which your slave is tumbling,
attracted—impelled—by your omnipo-
tence!
LAZY — He'll need our aid presently!
IMPROPER — Thieves bring themselves to the *noose*!
EGO — I was I, and you were you—
and I would—I would that—
PROPER — The I and the you are one!
LADY — Why do you let them speak?
EGO — Silence, trespassers!
That the I and the you were we—pre-
cisely!
LADY — (*coquettishly*)—What does that mean?
EGO — It means, so to speak, that my desire—
that the thought of my heart—and the
heart of my thought—
LAZY — Bolder, Master!
PROPER — That he—not his thought and his
heart—
IMPROPER — That he wants you!
EGO — Not that I want you—
LADY — You don't?
BELLY — Belch louder, Slave!
EGO — But that I want that you shall—
The henchmen begin pressing forward.
FASTIDIOUS — Vociferously, Babblor!
EGO — That *you* shall want *me*!
LADY — Is that all? How very amusing!
FASTIDIOUS — Sex tweedledum!

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

LADY — Oh—I want to return—
to the prettier courtship—of Proper and
Improper!

THE TWINS — Madam!

PROPER — I want me for yourself—

IMPROPER — I want you for myself—

LADY — Though the duo's familiar, it's dulcet—
faster, gentlemen!

EGO — What ho, what ho!

I know a little song that can sing to high
C—

your bridal song, Woman!

*He produces the pistol. Lady eyes it com-
ically.*

LADY — What a dainty instrument! It can
twitter?

EGO — It'll make you twitter—down, Madam!

LADY — Hand it to me!

EGO — Down on your knees!

LADY — Will you hand it to me on *your* knees?

Ego obeys. The henchmen roll him aside.

*Lady holds the pistol over her head, finger on trigger. They
avert their heads. There is only the click of the hammer.*

LADY — Pooh!

THE COMPANY — Bah!

LAZY — Turncoat!

IMPROPER — Impostor!

FASTIDIOUS — Apostate!

Ego slinks to the background.

LADY — Improper!

IMPROPER — Lady?

AT THE SIGN OF THE THUMB AND NOSE

LADY — My brazen pet—
 take this dreadful thing outdoors—
 steal craftily through the night to my
 estate—

 patter ever so softly to my garden—
IMPROPER — Yes, yes!

LADY — And, dead or alive—bring Belly his
 pheasant!

IMPROPER — Madam!

LADY — Obey!

*He obeys—after ironically making the
sign to Ego! Lady looks at the company. They stand for
a moment of silent awe—then attack Ego in derisive cres-
cendo.*

FASTIDIOUS — Fancy the I being touched by the
 thought of a you!

LAZY — To what are we canonized?

QUARTETTE — The self!

FASTIDIOUS — In consequence of this disrupting phe-
 nomenon—

PROPER — Our law is in need of some revision—

LADY — What law?

LAZY — His law!

FASTIDIOUS — Not of revision—

PROPER — Of elongation!

FASTIDIOUS — Each one of us is an I-am-I!

LADY — That phrase again—what does it mean?

FASTIDIOUS — That you are an I-am-I!

PROPER — You are *the* I-am-I!

LADY — Ego, what do they mean?

EGO — (*resignedly*)—They mean sedition, mam
 —my day is past.

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

- FASTIDIOUS — Her I-am-I shall become an I-am-us—
 PROPER — Or you return empty-handed!
 LADY — Who return?
 PROPER — Improper and I.
 LADY — I begin to understand—tell me some
 more!
 EGO — Peace, Lady!
 LADY — Peace, Sir!
 Come close, children, so we do not offend
 him.
 They do so. In pantomime turn, they
rapidly gesticulate, and whisper in her ears. Lady nodding
in a tempo of delight, with interrupting chuckles of “Ego—
Ego!”
 EGO — Madam!
 LADY — Silence, you!
 Continued whispering.
 LADY — And what is the song?
 FASTIDIOUS — It requires some slight amendment.
 LADY — Sing it—sing it for me!
 QUARTETTE — *(with Lazy beating time)*—
 Mistress Ego, Mistress Ego,
 we are you, and you are we-oh!
 BELLY — I am the body which—needeth thy
 nourishment—
 FASTIDIOUS — I the cool brain which—counseleth thy
 flourishment—
 LAZY — I the high bird which—soareth to thy
 soul—
 PROPER — I—we the harriers who bring thee thy
 dole—
 QUARTETTE — Sovereign Ego, Sovereign Ego,

AT THE SIGN OF THE THUMB AND NOSE

we are you, and you are we-oh!

LADY — (*clapping her hands*)—

And Ego—you dedicate this to me?

EGO — (*sullenly*)—This and all else.

LADY — (*looking about innocently*)—What else
have you for me?

Oh—what sign is that yonder?

EGO — The symbol of this hallowed place!

LADY — I don't like it—please take it down!

EGO — Sacrilege—Madam—I beg of you—

PROPER — I'll take it down in a tumult!

LADY — Thank you—Ego will take it down.

It is my wish—and his privilege.

*Ego goes slowly behind the bar. The
quartette nudge one another. The symbol is removed.*

FASTIDIOUS — This is truly the most dauntless spirit
Man ever encountered!

Madam, my intellect bends homage to
yours!

LADY — Fastidious, I suspect you're the man of
sentiment here—

I could unravel hairs with you in eternal
gusto!

What sign would you say belongs up
yonder?

FASTIDIOUS — Your question lures an immediate re-
tort—

At The Sign Of The Heart And Soul!

THE OTHERS — Fastidious!

EGO — Scandalous!

LADY — Lazy, did you devise that handicraft?

LAZY — Mine was the disgrace, high liege—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

- LADY — See that you devise another at once!
EGO — Wife!
LADY — Silence, Husband!
She blows him a quick kiss. He blows back a slow one, and smiles.
BELLY — Père Ego succumbs to Mère Ego!
THE OTHERS — Hail, Mother Ego!
LADY — Belly, for your benign inspiration—
your shall have a laurel payment—
help me down, sirs!
They come forward with one will. Clamoring, they help her down from her throne.
LADY — Husband, come hither!
EGO — Spouse?
LADY — You have introduced me to these heroic
spirits—
now introduce me to the spirit which
gives them breath—
lead me to the kitchen!
Ego gallantly raises his hand on high. She takes it deftly. They proceed to the kitchen.
QUARTETTE — Bravo, Mother Ego!
They disappear. Improper comes running in, breathless, waving a pheasant—or is it a chicken?—over his head.
FASTIDIOUS — Hail, Gamester!
BELLY — Ambrosia, Ambrosia—the pheasant has
come!
LADY — (off-stage)—Improper!
IMPROPER — Madam?
LADY — Have you got it?
IMPROPER — Dead, Madam!

AT THE SIGN OF THE THUMB AND NOSE

LADY — Bring it here at once!
 Tossing the pistol on the bar, Improper
rushes off. Noisily, the others have taken possession of the
bar. Mugs and glasses spill over. They are raised on high.

LAZY — A toast, Fastidious!

FASTIDIOUS — Empress Ego!

QUARTETTE — Empress Ego!
 Improper returns in time for his mug.

BELLY — Ambrosia! Master!
 Save the goose for to-morrow?

EGO — Yes, Glutton!
 The quintette drink.

LADY — Dear—will you lend me your apron?

EGO — It is yours—to keep—precious Love!
 His quiet laugh spreads loud contagion.

SLOW CURTAIN.

UNEASY STREET



A Folk Play

To Alfred Stieglitz and 291

UNEASY STREET

A Folk Play in Two Scenes



Persons, in the order of their first appearance:

I. B. WOUNDY, the undertaker

EDWARD LEMON, the florist

MR. JOUNCE, the butcher

MR. SPICK, the fish-man

MRS. SCRUBB, the laundress

MRS. SMOCK, the seamstress

MR. RYAN, the policeman

MR. RANSEED, the grocer



Scene I. Shops along Varick Street, Greenwich Village, New York City. Six o'clock of a spring evening.

Scene II. Mr. Woundy's sitting room, three hours later.



(The "ou" in "Woundy" is pronounced as in "sound.")

UNEASY STREET

SCENE I: A curtain so painted as to suggest a row of small shop windows. The two most prominent are adjacent and advertise I. B. Woundy, the undertaker, and Edward Lemon, the florist. In Mr. Woundy's window there is an ominous black coffin, and on the glass the simple inscription: I. B. WOUNDY, FUNERAL DECORATOR. Mr. Lemon's window displays a riot of spring flowers of every denomination; the inscription is florid: EDWARD LEMON, HORTICULTURIST, ORDERS TAKEN FOR WEDDINGS, CHURCH SOCIABLES, CHRISTENINGS, FUNERALS, ETC. In both stores, a door or swinging flap.

Mr. Woundy, a tiny, fleshless, shrewd-skulled hulk of sixty-five, comes out with his evening chair and clay pipe black with age, quickly sits down, nervously lights the pipe, crosses his legs and begins swinging his foot. A frown and short irregular puffs betray the irascibility of his present mood.

Mr. Lemon, slow, stout, forty-five, a species of cheerful geranium, appears with his evening chair and new corn cob. Mr. Woundy ignores Mr. Lemon as the latter carefully deposits his chair fairly close, smiles affably, slowly lights his pipe and puffs deliberately.

MR. LEMON — (genial tenor). Well, and how's business,
Neighbor Woundy?

MR. WOUNDY — (raucous bass). Still slow, Lemon.

MR. LEMON — Why, I thought that Mrs. Smock—

MR. WOUNDY — No, Mrs. Smock didn't croak. That
fool, Dr. Small, managed to pull
her through.

MR. LEMON — Hm! That's rather bad for you.

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

- MR. WOUNDY — It's bad for you too, Lemon. She's
got heaps of generous relations.
- MR. LEMON — Still, I can't complain.
- MR. WOUNDY — How so?
- MR. LEMON — There's been four christenings lately.
Little Edward Peacock, the Saddler
twins and—
- MR. WOUNDY — Children, thank God, keep on coming.
- MR. LEMON — And then there's them two weddings on
Perry Street—
- MR. WOUNDY — Of course, weddings go right on.
- MR. LEMON — And the church sociable at St. John's
and the Greenwich fair and—
- MR. WOUNDY — Of course, of course!
- MR. LEMON — Flowers, Mr. Woundy, is always in
demand. People don't have to die.
The flower trade takes care of itself.
- MR. WOUNDY — Flowers in demand? Flowers be damned!
Death's the only thing in demand.
Bodies, dead things, everything. Don't
flowers die? Your little pinks and your
little pansies and your little roses and
all that tomfoolery? Everything dies,
everybody. They've got to die—
- MR. LEMON — But flowers symbolize life and the return
thereof.
- MR. WOUNDY — What do you mean? Don't life die?
And your return thereof? What's that
for except to die?
- MR. LEMON — That's true enough.
- MR. WOUNDY — Of course, it's true. It's the only truth.
Nations die, ages die, gods die. Who

said it wasn't true? (*Suddenly pointing with his pipe*)—Look at that old rascal crawling along over there! What good will his silly cane do him to-morrow? Look at him look over here! And look at him look away! He saw me. He knows. Huh! Doctors or no doctors, they've all got to come. He's afraid, the old scoundrel.

MR. LEMON — Yes, he's afraid.

MR. WOUNDY — Afraid? And so are you. So is everybody. Greater than death is the fear of death. You all know that. What do they do, men, women, children, doctors, priests and all? You've seen them. Do they go by here? (*Mr. Lemon shakes his head.*) Every blessed one sneaks over there and goes on his petty way, on his petty errand, on his petty something or other. You know why. (*Mr. Lemon nods affably.*) The measly snivelling cowards—Spick, the fishman, whose aunt I buried, Jounce, fat, blustering Jounce, whose wife, father and grandfather came to me, Mrs. Scrubb, whose dainty husband and three pimply children—she killed them maybe, but I buried them. And didn't I bury Uncle, Mother and Father Ranseed? Why, the only one who goes by here is Officer Pat Ryan, pride of the street, he and his twiddling club, 'cause

he saved a drowning child, that I buried despite him the week after. And he—he only goes by at night to see that our doors are locked. I know them. They've been coming to me for forty years. And they used to come to my father, sir. The flower trade! (*A moment's silence.*) Every one of them gets his cheap box to lie in, his imitation ebony or mahogany, if he didn't slave and save, and his genuine, if he did. Every one of them gets his stupid stone, monument or angel's wings, and his hearse and two, four, ten, twenty or a hundred carriages. Every one of the self-respecting lot—don't I know them?—wouldn't they like to get up in their box just to pipe: Look at my sixty-six carriages? (*Mr. Lemon smiles and nods.*) But with all their self-respect, with all their sweat and saving of pennies, with all their wives and children and grandchildren, and their dreams—what is it lies so dark at the bottom of their hearts, what is it makes them bounce o' bed at night, what is it makes them crawl along over there? It's the innocent black box behind me there! (*Mr. Woundy stares at his rival with malignant joy and at last begins smoking comfortably.*)

MR. LEMON —

Yes, they're all afraid, sir.

UNEASY STREET

MR. WOUNDY — Afraid? And so are you, Lemon.

MR. LEMON — Well, I shouldn't quite say—

MR. WOUNDY — *You* shouldn't quite say? That *you* aint afraid? That *you* wont have to come?

MR. LEMON — (*between contented puffs*)—I shouldn't quite say that I—would be exactly—afraid.

MR. WOUNDY — Huh! And who are you, Mr. Edward Lemon, that you wouldn't be afraid? Who are you that the sight of that little black thing (*jerking his pipe over his shoulder*) don't scare the very bowels out of you?

MR. LEMON — (*turning with exasperating indifference and eyeing the familiar object as though he saw it for the first time*)—Me afraid? Me scared of a mere black box? Why, I could go to *sleep* in a box like that.

MR. WOUNDY — Go to sleep in a coffin? What—who ever—you? You go to sleep in a coffin?

MR. LEMON — Yes, me to go sleep in a coffin.

MR. WOUNDY — I challenge you to it! I challenge you, sir! Who ever heard—you're crazy—you're bluffing. Ha, that's it. I'll call your bluff, you white lily. You can't bluff old man Woundy. *You* sleep in a coffin! I challenge you. If I can't bury any more dead men I'll bury a live one. Come on!

MR. LEMON — But not just now, Mr. Woundy.

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

MR. WOUNDY — Ha, ha, I thought so! Sleep in a coffin indeed! Here's where I'll make a show of you in front of your friends—the crawling worms—they've loved you all these years—they've loved a fraud—you and your flowers and flower trade. You're a fraud. That's you, Lemon. Not just now!

MR. LEMON — No, not just now. It's too early—

MR. WOUNDY — To be shoveled away?

MR. LEMON — No, its too early in the evening. I aint sleepy yet. I couldn't go off now. Nobody ever went to sleep when he wasn't sleepy.

MR. WOUNDY — Then you can when you are?

MR. LEMON — Yes.

MR. WOUNDY — In a coffin?

MR. LEMON — Yes.

MR. WOUNDY — This very night?

MR. LEMON — This very night.

MR. WOUNDY — I'll bet you you can't.

MR. LEMON — What'll you bet?

MR. WOUNDY — I'll—I'll bet you a glass of beer at O'Sullivan's.

MR. LEMON — Done!

MR. WOUNDY — That you can't go to sleep in a coffin.

MR. LEMON — Done!

MR. WOUNDY — On my premises!

MR. LEMON — Inside of five minutes!

MR. WOUNDY — I'll give you ten!

MR. LEMON — No, five!

MR. WOUNDY — Done!

UNEASY STREET

MR. LEMON — Done!

A moment of awful silence.

MR. WOUNDY — Hold on, Lemon! There's a hole somewhere. We'll have to have witnesses.

MR. LEMON — We will.

MR. WOUNDY — All your friends—Jounce and Spick and Mrs. Scrubb and—

MR. LEMON — Your enemies—Mrs. Smock and Ryan and—

MR. WOUNDY — Every skulking one of them!

MR. LEMON — Who'll be referee?

MR. WOUNDY — Ryan's off beat Thursdays.

MR. LEMON — Ryan'll do.

MR. WOUNDY — Ho, ho, Lemon! But will they come? Have you thought of that, eh? On *my* premises! Jounce and Spick and the rest—in my little room—who, sir, who's going to make them come?

MR. LEMON — Don't mind a little scare like your premises, Mr. Woundy, I will.

MR. WOUNDY — You?

MR. LEMON — Yes, me.

MR. WOUNDY — You'll have to chain 'em and gag 'em and bind 'em and drag 'em, carcass and soul.

MR. LEMON — No, I won't.

MR. WOUNDY — Yes, you will.

MR. LEMON — No, I won't.

MR. WOUNDY — It's a go then?

MR. LEMON — It's a go.

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

MR. WOUNDY — It's war, is it?

MR. LEMON — War, if you will.

MR. WOUNDY — Shake?

MR. LEMON — Shake.

They shake hands.

MR. WOUNDY — (*with mock generosity*)—Lemon! You're the first man to shake hands with me in years.

MR. LEMON — Thank you, sir.

The undertaker puts away his clay, folds his arms and challenges the sky with a smirk of pity. The florist calmly goes on puffing his cob. The lights go out for an instant, and the curtain rises on Scene II.

SCENE II: *Three hours later. Mr. Woundy's sitting room. Small and unattractive; eight crippled heterogeneous chairs, shelves littered with dust-laden books, a small table, a colorless moth-eaten rug, odds and ends on a mantelpiece, and on the walls, pictures of Woundys who have gone before. The chairs are drawn in front of the left wall in three rows in the shape of a miniature amphitheater (three, three and two); the table and shelves stand to the right of a door, down stage, left, leading to the hall and street. Right center, almost under a gas jet, and supported by the customary pedestal, a really beautiful and generous sized ebony coffin. In front of it, an arm chair. Another door, left, beyond the chairs, leads into the bed-room.*

It is the night of Mr. Woundy's life. He is putting quick finishing touches about the room: a funeral wreath here, another there, and finally one on the coffin itself. Now and then he rubs his hands almost gleefully; now and then he stops and listens.

Cautious shuffling followed by a timid knock at the hall door. Mr. Woundy hurries over and opens it.

MR. WOUNDY — Good evening, good evening, good evening—step right in, all of you—a delightful surprise—come in, come in—Jounce, won't you lead the way? My, what a lot of you!

A singular little procession, led by Mr. Jounce, ordinarily a formidable man, sidles rather than files into the room: Mr. Spick, tall and thin, and Mrs. Scrubb, who waddles. They are middle-aged folk, dressed in their Sunday clothes. Mr. Jounce tries to give his leadership an air.

MR. WOUNDY — Ah, Mrs. Scrubb—good evening, Mrs. Scrubb—and you, Spick. How are you, mam?

MRS. SCRUBB — All them steps, sir—all them steps.

MR. WOUNDY — The golden stairs to heaven, eh? Take off your things and rest yourself. (*Mr. Jounce helps her.*) Aint Jounce the gentleman? If Mrs. Jounce was alive to see that now! But what's become of Spick?

Mr. Spick, in his effort to be of assistance, stumbles over Mrs. Scrubb and spies the coffin.

MR. SPICK — Good Lord!

The others see the coffin and quickly occupy themselves.

MR. WOUNDY — (*has caught sight of somebody in the hall, afraid to enter*)—Why, there's still another of you, and a lady, too. Good

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

evening, mam, come in, come in! (*Dismayed*)—Well, of all people, if it aint Mrs. Smock! (*Recovering himself*)—Come in, Mrs. Smock. So glad to see you, so glad to hear of your getting well. This is indeed a pleasant surprise.

A sickly nervous woman, gentle of mien, fairly creeps into the room. Mr. Spick goes to her assistance.

MR. WOUNDY — (*as his guests jostle one another and stare in every direction but the coffin*)—Now then! Make yourselves as comfortable as you can. Just as you would at a play. Everybody gets an orchestra seat.

Pursued rather than followed by his party,

Mr. Jounce starts for the chairs in the rear.

MR. WOUNDY — Ladies first, ladies first!

Mrs. Scrubb and Mrs. Smock, aided more by Mr. Woundy than Mr. Jounce, settle down. The butcher hastily squeezes himself between them. Mr. Spick fumbles with the second row chairs. The women titter.

MR. WOUNDY — Fine, a beautiful arrangement! Like a bouquet of Lemon's best flowers. And Jounce, ha! What would you call Jounce?

MRS. SMOCK — He's the thorn among the roses, sir.

MR. WOUNDY — And Spick—poor lone Spick—what are you up to?

MR. SPICK — (*mournfully holding a chair*)—I—I'm—

MR. JOUNCE — You look like a fish lost at sea.

MR. WOUNDY — Sit down, sir, sit down.

Mr. Spick sits down abruptly and shoves his chair close to the others.

UNEASY STREET

MR. WOUNDY — Too bad, but don't you mind. That little box aint for you though you're nearest to it. It's for our friend, Lemon.

MR. SPICK — Has he come?

MR. WOUNDY — Not yet, but he'll be along if his feet aint grown cold.

The guests exchange glances.

How about the rest of you? Ryan and Ranseed and—

MR. JOUNCE — They're coming in another party.

MR. WOUNDY — Fine, a good idea, this coming in crowds! There's no telling what'll happen to a man along Varick Street. It was only the other night I was thinking when I closed up shop—the street was so dark, you know: There ought to be more lamps hereabouts. Some day a man'll get murdered and it wont be his fault. There, there! Cheerful talk, good friends, cheerful talk is what we want on a night like this, eh, Mrs. Scrubb?

MRS. SCRUBB — Indeed, your honor, indeed.

MR. WOUNDY — Cheerful talk — you're right, mam. That's what life was made for.

Further shuffling, and another knock at the hall door—this time an ordinary knock. Immediate general relief. Mr. Woundy goes reluctantly and opens the door.

MR. WOUNDY — Good evening, good evening—step right in—ah, Mr. Ryan, our referee—so glad to see the pride of the force, sir!

Mr. Ryan enters. He is in uniform.

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

His is the impersonal aloofness of the officer of the law; he carries his part with professional dignity. He is followed by Mr. Ranseed, who is over corpulent.

MR. RYAN — How are you, sir?

MR. WOUNDY — How are you, Mr. Ryan? And Ranseed! Well, the pride of all grocers. How do you do, Ranseed?

MR. RANSEED — Evening, sir—evening.

MR. WOUNDY — Hm! You want to be taking better care of yourself. Remember your father that went off with the asthma? Just a little pleasantry, just a little fun!

Mumbling, Mr. Ranseed joins Mr. Ryan.

They approach the chairs. The firstcomers rise, but each one, especially Mr. Jounce, is careful to keep his place. General greetings.

MR. WOUNDY — And are there any more coming?

MR. RYAN — We're all here now.

MR. WOUNDY — Good! Now wont you sit down, Ranseed?

MR. RANSEED — (*spying the coffin, with droll appreciation*)—We should have come sooner.

MR. WOUNDY — Not at all, sir! You'll be just as easy out front, and able to see everything better.

Mr. Ranseed sits down next to Mr. Spick; they pull their chairs close together. Mr. Ryan takes a chair in the front row. Mr. Woundy goes into the bed room with the two extra chairs.

MR. SPICK — Where's Lemon?

MRS. SCRUBB — Yes, where's that tulip?

UNEASY STREET

MR. RYAN — Leave off fuming and fretting. Lemon's after taking a few beers down at O'Sullivan's.

MR. JOUNCE — Do you think it'll help?

MR. RYAN — How?

MR. SPICK — Will it help his going to sleep?

MR. RYAN — Beer? Beer would make the angels sleep.

MRS. SMOCK — Then you think—

MR. RYAN — I think nothing. I'm only referee. That's all I'm here for. If Lemon goes to sleep, he wins; if he don't, he loses. That's all. There is those, of course, who wouldn't sleep on a whole keg of beer—

THE COMPANY — Ah!

MR. RYAN — And Lemon's got a mighty paunch. It'd take a lot to fill it and then go to his head.

THE COMPANY — Ah!

MR. SPICK — But do you mean to say Lemon would so much as dare get into—into that thing?

MR. RYAN — I can't say. It's not up to me. I'm referee.

MRS. SMOCK — Look at it over there waiting for him.

MR. RANSEED — With its mouth wide open.

MR. SPICK — It could swallow a whale.

MR. JOUNCE — Ain't it real though?

THE WOMEN — Ugh!

MR. JOUNCE — Looks as though it was taking one of us.

MR. RANSEED — It's big enough to.

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

- MRS. SMOCK — Look at the wreath stuck to its side.
- MRS. SCRUBB — And them wreaths on the walls.
- MR. SPICK — Aint it ghost-like? It makes me creep.
- MR. RYAN — Sh! He's coming back.
- Mr. Woundy returns.*
- MR. WOUNDY — (*rubbing his hands*)—Did I hear somebody remark on a wreath? Who was it?
- MR. JOUNCE — Mother Scrubb!
- MRS. SCRUBB — Go on, you pork-packer. It was—
- MR. WOUNDY — Peace, peace, good friends. It's immaterial who. But which wreath—which wreath did you mean? This one? Maybe this one? Ah, friends, then you must have meant this one! (*He approaches the coffin and strokes the wreath affectionately*) And I don't blame you. It's the finest in my whole establishment. It'd do honor to the mayor himself. I'll tell you how it happened: Says I to myself: on the one hand, here's our much loved neighbor, Mr. Edward Lemon. Giving him all his deserts, he's a brave man, a worthy citizen, fit for a lion keeper more than a tamer of flowers. He's challenged you, Woundy, actually challenged you—in itself a wonderful thing—to sleep, actually to go to sleep in a coffin—in this coffin maybe. (*Patting it tenderly*)—Good. We won't argue the matter. It don't need arguing.
- MR. JOUNCE — He's a wonderful brave man, indeed.

UNEASY STREET

MRS. SCRUBB — To think of his daring to—

MRS. SMOCK — Yes, in that—

MR. WOUNDY — On the other hand, says I: Trade—trade has been bad lately, very bad. For weeks now, nobody in the village has died; nobody's been buried, nobody's been near your little shop, Woundy—well, since Lemuel Zink went to Evergreen Cemetery. Mrs. Smock—beg pardon, mam, I mean no offense. I've only the best of wishes for you. But I've got to tell you the whole of my thoughts, eh?

MRS. SMOCK — Yes sir!

MR. WOUNDY — Thank you, mam. Now Mrs. Smock, thanks to the blessed skill of Dr. Small and the aid of the Almighty, got past her pneumonia. Eh, Mrs. Smock?

MRS. SMOCK — Yes indeed, sir. Least I hope so.

MR. WOUNDY — You understand, mam—these are only my thoughts.

MRS. SMOCK — Yes, yes, Mr. Woundy.

MR. WOUNDY — Says I to myself: Trade is bad. Mrs. Smock has escaped, so what's to happen now? There's nobody sick in the street, not so sick that they're about to croak. And yet, there's dead things all around you—but dead people.

MR. JOUNCE — What are you at, man?

MR. WOUNDY — You ought to get me, Jounce. You're a butcher. Says I: there's Jounce; aint he got dead things around him, yet he

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

don't bury them. And there's Spick, the fish-man; he's got dead things all around him, but he don't bury them. And there's Ranseed, the grocer; he's got dead things, and he don't bury them. Everything is dead, everything is dying—but the people of Varick Street! (*He lowers his voice to an ominous dirge. His auditors are huddling together. Only Mr. Ryan retains his non-committal composure.*) And I says to myself: Well, Woundy, if you can't bury any more dead men you'll have to—who knows?—maybe you'll have to bury a live one! My friends, you can never be sure about life and death. The queerest things will happen. So there's only one thing to do: it's to be *prepared*. That's why you see them wreaths on the walls. (*Patting the coffin wreath*)—And that's why this little beauty is here.

MR. SPICK — What do you mean?

MR. WOUNDY — I mean that I know and you don't.

MR. SPICK — That I don't know?

MR. WOUNDY — Not you alone, Spick, but all of you. If you knew, wouldn't you have brought flowers—pansies and roses and lilies and wreaths and horsehoes and angels' wings and such like? Wouldn't you have prepared? You would have bought out Lemon's whole store.

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MR. RANSEED — But—but what is it—what is it *you* know?

MR. WOUNDY — Ha, Ranseed! That we'll find out in another breath. Says I to myself: On the one hand, there's Mr. Lemon, our friend and neighbor. He's a brave man. He's going to step right into this little box here. He's going to try and go to sleep. He's going to make a fool of old man Woundy. Good! Maybe he will. I hope he does. But on the other hand: suppose Mr. Lemon should go to sleep, fooling Mr. Woundy and then—you never can know about life and death—and trade so bad—the queerest things will happen—suppose Lemon don't wake up again? What then? Don't be frightened, friends. There ain't nothing to be afraid of? Don't we all go the way of a box like this? Didn't your dear husband and children go this way, Mrs. Scrubb, didn't your aunt, Spick, and your wife, father and grandfather, Jounce, and your uncle, mother and father, Ranseed? All our mothers and fathers and grandmothers and grandfathers, kind friends? Why should we be afraid? Why shouldn't we go the way the loved ones went? Look at them pictures on the wall! Every one a Woundy! That one there was my father. And he an undertaker! He went in a box like this,

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carrying his trade with him. That one there was my grandfather, and he an undertaker. He went in a box like this. And I—the last of the Woundys—I'll go in a box like this! Am I afraid? Do I look afraid?

SEVERAL — No sir, no indeed, no—

MR. WOUNDY — And I don't think Lemon would be. 'Twas only my thoughts, friends. My reason for the wreaths, for this little fellow here. If Lemon should go to sleep and not wake up, where would his flowers be? Think of that, and you his neighbors all these years, you all loving him! No funeral—no funeral is complete without flowers!

Blows on the hall door. Fright, disorder and a jumping up from chairs.

MR. RYAN — (who has not lost his equanimity)—Come in whoever you are!

The door is pushed open and somebody appears, his arms so burdened with flowers that his head is buried from view. The man comes up-stage with difficulty, and drops the flowers between Mr. Woundy and the company. There stands Mr. Lemon, smiling, bowing, rubbing his hands.

MR. LEMON — Good evening, good friends.

A kaleidoscopic reaction on the part of the guests. With the exception of Mr. Ryan, they crowd forward to shake hands.

MR. JOUNCE — Ladies first, ladies first!

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- MR. SPICK — You're a sight for the very dead, a flower garden itself.
- MRS. SCRUBB — And you the rose of them all.
- MR. LEMON — (*under the additional embarrassment of liquor, but with extreme unction*)—
Madam, you do me very great honor.
- MR. SPICK — You deserve it, sir.
- MR. RANSEED — My own wife would love you for it.
- MR. JOUNCE — And mine if she was alive.
- MRS. SCRUBB — If you was only a marrying man, and I hadn't buried my man only six months ago!
- MR. LEMON — Madam, have a heart for my feelings.
You offer me—an iris!
- THE COMPANY — Ah!
- MR. JOUNCE — And there's still another, Lemon.
- MR. LEMON — What's that? Well, well, dear Mrs. Smock! You here? Who would 'a' thought it? (*She takes his hand timidly.*)
I didn't think *you'd* come, mam?
- MRS. SMOCK — I didn't know—I didn't know but I would—after what you told me—that I was well enough to come—and nothing—nothing to be really afraid of?
- MR. LEMON — Why no—not at all—what makes you say that? (*He notices the company looking past him, at Mr. Woundy standing near the coffin in a mood of challenge and annoyance.*) Ah, Mr. Woundy! How do you do, sir?
- MR. WOUNDY — Good evening, Lemon.

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Mr. Woundy takes Mr. Lemon's hand mechanically. An exchange of glances sobers the florist, and he eyes the coffin.

MR. LEMON — In real professional style, Mr. Woundy.
Just like a real funeral, sir.

MR. WOUNDY — It'll be your funeral, Lemon.

MR. LEMON — Well, and a wreath, a funeral wreath. That was real thoughtful of you. (*He handles it with critical playfulness.*) It looks like an old one. It aint quite up-to-date, is it?

MR. WOUNDY — It's good enough for you.

MR. LEMON — You must forgive me, I've always an eye for trade. Them up there'll do, Mr. Woundy, but not this one, right on the coffin itself. (*The guests approach as near as they dare.*)

MR. WOUNDY — What?

MR. LEMON — (*going to his flowers with a business-like air*)—Something told me Mr. Woundy was going to do things in style, so I says: Edward Lemon, it's best to be *prepared*. (*Guests nudge one another.*) I says: You're in the flower business, Mr. Woundy aint. It's possible our good neighbor wont be up-to-date when it comes to the decorations. So—I brought—this little fellow here. Aint he a beauty? (*He holds up an ornate wreath across which runs the word, L-E-M-O-N. Mr. Woundy is momentarily overcome. The guests applaud. Mr. Lemon returns*

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to the coffin, but Mr. Woundy bars his way. The applause stops. Mr. Ryan steps between the rivals.)

MR. RYAN — Mr. Woundy! Mr. Lemon's right.

MR. WOUNDY — Mr. Ryan!

MR. RYAN — Mr. Woundy! I'm referee here.

Mr. Woundy moves aside with bad grace.

Mr. Ryan takes Mr. Lemon's wreath and substitutes it for the undertaker's.

MR. LEMON — And now to the flowers!

MR. JOUNCE — Yes, the flowers, Lemon. Why the flowers?

MR. LEMON — Is a funeral complete without flowers? (*Sensation.*) Ah, friends! Did you think of flowers? Did you, Mr. Spick? Did you, Mr. Jounce? And the ladies—not even the ladies?

MRS. SCRUBB — But we didn't know we was coming to a funeral?

MR. LEMON — That's so, aint it though? You must forgive me, friends. You all came to a sleeping contest, eh?

THE COMPANY — Yes, yes!

MR. LEMON — To sleep or not to sleep, as the poet says.

THE COMPANY — Yes, yes!

MR. LEMON — You did right not to bring flowers. After all, none of you is florists. None of you understands about flowers. Well, it's this way: if I don't go to sleep—if I can't—

SEVERAL — But you will, you will—

MR. LEMON — Well, if I do go to sleep, I'll sleep.

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

That's plain. You're all so kind and understanding. But suppose—did you think of that—suppose I shouldn't wake up again? What of that, eh? (*Everybody stares at Mr. Woundy. He smirks malevolently.*) You see, Mr. Woundy understands.

MR. WOUNDY — You bet I do.

MR. LEMON — Ah, friends, you don't know what life is, like me and Mr. Woundy. I see it grow, he sees it die. And *I* see it die. Haven't I watched them all my life? Tended them since I was no higher than a daisy? Given them so much water and so much sun? Sprinkled them like a mother? But even the best of them dies. And aint we—aint we all flowers?

MRS. SMOCK — But if you'd die, you'd bloom again.
In Heaven at least!

MR. LEMON — And that's how I knew you wouldn't know and why I brought all them decorations.

MRS. SCRUBB — With all this sleeping and dying you're running daft. What's itching you?

MR. LEMON — First of all, mam, it aint every man can come to his own funeral?

MRS. SCRUBB — No.

MR. LEMON — And it aint every man can bring his own flowers?

MRS. SCRUBB — No.

MR. LEMON — So I brought my own flowers to my own funeral! But you mustn't think I

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brought them for myself to give myself.
Trade on Varick Street—trade is bad.
Jounce has been suffering.

MR. JOUNCE — I should say so.

MR. LEMON — Ranseed's complaining—

MR. RANSEED — That I am—

MR. LEMON — The fish game is drooping.

MR. SPICK — That it is—

MR. LEMON — Why Mr. Woundy himself, as has always done a thriving trade, was saying only this evening—

MR. WOUNDY — Leave me out!

MR. LEMON — Pardon, sir, no offense intended! I says: Everybody's suffering—everybody but you, Edward Lemon. With you, flowers is always in demand. When there aint funerals there's christenings. When there aint christenings there's church sociables. There's always something. Why don't you be generous? You're going to this funeral of yours. Take a few flowers to give yourself, but take bunches and bunches for your friends to give you. (*Atmosphere clears.*) So here they are, friends. Look at them.

MRS. SMOCK — We'll bury you under them so the whole world'll know where you lie.

MR. LEMON — A pretty speech, mam. Just like you to say that. But to work! The hour grows late and I must sleep! Mrs. Scrubb, what'll you have?

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

- MRS. SCRUBB — I aint soft on flowers. But you can give me them yellow things, thanking you.
- MR. LEMON — Jonquils, mam. The return of affection. Mrs. Smock—these arbutuses for you?
- MRS. SMOCK — What may they be?
- MR. LEMON — The first flower of spring. Just like you, they come back every year. Just when you think they're gone. Mr. Ranseed?
- MR. RANSEED — Sweet peas for me, Neighbor Lemon!
- MR. LEMON — Ah, the symbol of your trade. Mr. Spick?
- MR. SPICK — What do I want with flowers, a man of the sea like me?
- MR. LEMON — Ah, that shows you don't know your trade. Ain't there seaweed and coral and the like? You must take these ferns. Who's left now? Mr. Jounce!
- MR. JOUNCE — Flowers is for women, Lemon.
- MR. LEMON — You've got to take something. You shall have pinks. The nearest I've got to the blood of beef.
- MR. JOUNCE — You're going daft. Mother Scrubb's right. You and your dying.
- MR. LEMON — You ought to know better, sir.
- MR. JOUNCE — I know what I know. You're going to sleep—if you can. That's all.
- MR. LEMON — Haven't I been after explaining—
- MR. JOUNCE — That you won't wake up? Suppose you do go to sleep and win your bet—as *I* hope—(*He dares to throw a glance at Mr. Woundy.*) Don't you think we'll be able to wake you?

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- MR. LEMON — How so?
- MR. JOUNCE — Maybe we'll let you sleep a little while, but do you think we'll let you more than that? (*General delight. Mr. Woundy occupies himself with imaginary cares.*)
- MR. LEMON — We'll see about that, Mr. Jounce, in its right season. Who else now? Mr. Ryan?
- MR. RYAN — Count me out, I'm referee.
- MR. WOUNDY — Lemon, when are you coming to the end of this?
- MR. LEMON — Sorry, Mr. Woundy—
- MR. WOUNDY — You and your weeds and sickly twaddle! Ryan, I appeal to you!
- MR. RYAN — Mr. Lemon, I got to decide against you. The time is getting on.
- MR. LEMON — Right you are, sir. Friends, you'll have to excuse me now. (*The guests return to the chairs. But all want the front ones this time.*) I'm ready, Mr. Ryan.
- MR. RYAN — Then you'll step in as you are?
- MR. LEMON — No, not quite. If Mr. Woundy don't mind, I'd like to make a little change.
- MR. WOUNDY — Afraid of soiling your clothes?
- MR. LEMON — It ain't that, but I'd be more comfortable without my coat and vest and this collar.
- MR. RYAN — Why not take Mr. Lemon into your bedroom for a wink or two?
- MR. WOUNDY — Very well.
- MR. RYAN — Will you want any comforts in the coffin itself? Pillows or—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

MR. LEMON — No, I'll go just like everybody else goes.

MR. RYAN — Good. Fair play to both sides. You may go, gentlemen.

(*Mr. Woundy leads the way, bows sardonically for Mr. Lemon to enter first, gives the guests an ominous scowl and follows.*)

MRS. SCRUBB — Aint they the terrible pair?

MRS. SMOCK — Mr. Lemon is a most beautiful man.

MR. SPICK — To think of him, just to think of him—
(*Mr. Jounce rises suddenly.*)

MRS. SCRUBB — What's wrong with you?

MR. JOUNCE — I'm off.

MRS. SCRUBB — Is it afraid you are?

MR. JOUNCE — Me afraid? Afraid nothing! I'll be back in a second. (*Stopping at the hall door and winking.*)

MR. RYAN — Be sure you come back on your toes—
easy-like.

MR. JOUNCE — All right. (*He tip-toes out.*)

MRS. SCRUBB — He's gone daft too.

MR. RANSEED — He's scared to be out so late.

MRS. SCRUBB — Him scared? Not him!

MR. SPICK — Who's afraid anyhow?

MR. RANSEED — Yes, who's afraid?
(*The guests eye one another and smile evasively.*)

MRS. SCRUBB — Aint *he* the brave one though?

MR. SPICK — Who, Jounce?

MRS. SMOCK — No, Mr. Lemon. Him so kind and soft
and gentle.

MR. SPICK — Do you think he'll do it?

MRS. SMOCK — Go to sleep in the coffin?

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MR. RANSEED — Course he will.

MR. SPICK — It don't look so terrible now. I think—
I think I could sleep in it myself. (*Mr. Woundy returns, stops and listens.*)

MRS. SMOCK — You go to sleep in the coffin?

MR. SPICK — (*timidly*)—Yes, me.

MR. WOUNDY — Come on, Spick! (*Mr. Spick nearly tumbles from his chair. Mr. Woundy confronts him.*) Well, Spick?

MR. SPICK — I was—I was only—

MR. WOUNDY — You was, you was—you yellow shrimp!

MR. RANSEED — Spick was only fooling-like.

MR. WOUNDY — Then you could do it, Ranseed?

MR. RANSEED — Oh, no, not me!

MR. WOUNDY — Is there anybody thinks he can? (*No answer.*) You're a fine lot, you and your flowers. You look like a hot-house. Huh! Where's Jounce?

MR. RANSEED — He's gone away—

MR. WOUNDY — Afraid, eh? Jounce the butcher, Jounce the bold! What? Why didn't the rest of you sneak off? The lot of you—the lot of you together wouldn't make one decent burial. I wouldn't waste one box on you.

MR. RYAN — (*touching him on the shoulder*)—Come, Mr. Woundy. Don't bother with them. We're wasting time.

Mr. Woundy turns with a scowl and follows Mr. Ryan to the coffin. The guests nudge one another stealthily. Mr. Woundy sits down in the arm chair.

MR. RYAN — (*calling out*)—Well, Mr. Lemon?

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

MR. LEMON — (*calling back*)—In another wink, sir.
All eyes watch the bed room door. Mr. Lemon makes a sensational entrance in a pair of lively yellow pajamas and a saucy pink night-cap dotted with violets. His air is one of modest bravado. Mr. Woundy, who has arisen, has to sit down again. With one will, the would-be mourners leave their places and try to intercept Mr. Lemon. He escapes by joining Mr. Ryan.

MR. RANSEED — You're doing the thing in style, old boy.

MR. SPICK — Better than Romeo.

MRS. SCRUBB — If you was only a marrying man!

MR. RYAN — Back with you all!

MR. RANSEED — You'll die a hero, old boy.

MR. SPICK — The death of Caesar.

MRS. SCRUBB — And we'll bury you.

(They threaten him with their flowers.)

MR. RYAN — Get back, I say, or I'll break your heads.

MR. RANSEED — (*standing his ground as the others retreat*)
Can you yawn, Lemon? (*Mr. Lemon yawns a magnificent yawn.*) That'll help some.

MR. SPICK — Anybody as can yawn can sleep.

MRS. SCRUBB — You'll win.

MR. RANSEED — You'll die all right.

(Mr. Ryan raises a majestic forefinger.

Mr. Ranseed joins the others. The audience sits down noisily.)

MR. RYAN — Silence in the court room! Are you ready, Mr. Lemon?

MR. LEMON — I am, sir.

MR. RYAN — And you, Mr. Woundy?

MR. WOUNDY — I am.

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- MR. RYAN — Are there any questions?
THE RIVALS — No.
MR. RYAN — Everything clear?
THE RIVALS — Yes.
MR. RYAN — Mr. Lemon, you're to go to sleep inside of five minutes. Am I right?
MR. LEMON — You are.
MR. RYAN — And if you fail you're to treat each of us to a glass of beer at O'Sullivan's?
MR. LEMON — I am.
MR. RYAN — And if he don't, Mr. Woundy, you—
MR. WOUNDY — That'll do, Ryan! You'll be putting me to sleep. Everything's clear.
MR. RYAN — Then go ahead!
Mr. Woundy, controlling himself, sits down. Mr. Lemon, after acknowledging some applause with a humble bow, approaches the coffin, manages to get his left leg over the side, and paws about with his foot like a man testing the temperature of a bath tub. His girth handicaps him. Deferentially, Mr. Ryan, with a lift and shove, helps him disappear.
THE COMPANY — Ah!
MR. RYAN — (*bending over the coffin*)—You comfortable?
MR. LEMON — (*faintly*)—Yes.
MR. RYAN — Pull in your elbow.
MR. LEMON — Thank you.
MR. RYAN — Are you ready?
MR. LEMON — (*almost inaudibly*)—Yes.
MR. RYAN — Then let her go!
(Mr. Ryan reaches up and lowers the gas till the room is in semi-darkness.)

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

THE COMPANY — Ah!

Mr. Ryan again raises a majestic fore-finger. The guests lean forward. They look ready to fall from their places.

MR. RYAN — Sh—sh!

THE COMPANY — Sh—sh!

The stillness of a funeral vault at night. Mr. Ryan looks into the coffin, tip-toes to the foot, takes out his watch, holds it to his ear, nods and faces the guests. Mr. Woundy has drawn himself into a ball. A yawn, like the howl of a jackal, from the coffin, and then silence. All ears are strained toward the coffin, all eyes toward Mr. Ryan.

Seconds pass. Mr. Ryan raises one finger. Somebody moves his chair and Mr. Ryan waves a warning. More seconds pass. Mr. Ryan raises two fingers. The hall door is opened noiselessly. Mr. Jounce appears through the gloom. The guests motion to him excitedly. He places something under the table and tip-toes over to the audience. He sits down carefully.

MR. JOUNCE — (in a nervous whisper)—How many?

MR. SPICK — Two!

Mr. Ryan raises three fingers. The guests are in a state of agony. Mr. Woundy is leaning forward. More seconds pass. A sound like a cat purring? Excited nudging. A second sound, a modest, elegiac snore. Mr. Woundy rises. The guests desert their places and edge forward. A third snore, no longer bashful, but brazen, egotistic, triumphant. An outburst of laughter from the guests; they charge upon the coffin.

MR. RYAN — (unable to hold them back)—Three minutes and forty-six seconds!

MR. JOUNCE — (turning up the gas)—Hurray!

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THE COMPANY — Hurray!

They throw their flowers on Mr. Lemon.

MR. RANSEED — (*shaking him*)—Wake up, Lemon, wake up!

MR. SPICK — Wake, Juliet, wake!

MRS. SMOCK — Is it dead he is?

MR. RANSEED — Dead with a roar like that?

MRS. SMOCK — Wake him, wake him before he dies!

MR. JOUNCE — I'll wake him—hold on—let me do it!
(*He stoops for something under the table.*)

MRS. SMOCK — There's a spell on him!

MRS. SCRUBB — A ghost has got him!

MRS. SMOCK — Edward, Edward, open your eyes!

MR. JOUNCE — (*stationing himself behind the coffin*)—
One moment, please. Let me at him!
Will you look at them yellow pajamas!
(*In a sort of incantation*)—Lift your head,
yellow pansy, lift your head to mother
dear! (*A sprinkling can of splendid proportions appears. The guests are convulsed. Mr. Jounce sprinkles carelessly.*)
Lift your head, yellow pansy. Mother
is sprinkling you.

MR. LEMON — (*sits up, rubs his eyes, stares at his neighbors, and begins drying his face with his sleeve*)—What the devil!

MR. JOUNCE — Not the devil, but your angel mother!
(*He puts down the can.*)

MR. RYAN — (*tapping the victor*)—Come out, sir.
You've won.
Mr. Lemon pushes the flowers aside.

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

They topple onto the floor. Struggling, the florist is tugged, lifted, dragged, yanked from the coffin.

MR. RANSEED — Speech, speech!

OTHERS — Speech, speech!

Mr. Lemon tries to say something, but he catches sight of Mr. Woundy, supported by, rather than leaning against the coffin. The guests follow the florist's stare and look petrified. But Mr. Spick leads an attack on the undertaker.

MR. SPICK — Afraid!

OTHERS — Afraid!

MRS. SCRUBB — The worm as has buried us all! (*Mr. Lemon forces his way to Mr. Woundy's side.*) Our grandfathers—

MR. RANSEED — Our mothers and grandmothers—

MR. JOUNCE — My wife, father—

MRS. SMOCK — And he'd bury us too!

MR. JOUNCE — Let's bury *him*!

MR. SPICK — Yes, pitch him into the coffin!

MR. JOUNCE — He's dead enough!

(Hands reach for Mr. Woundy. He retreats.)

MR. RANSEED — Revenge on him!

MR. JOUNCE — He used to sit waiting for us to come.
Chilling the marrow in our bones.
Waiting for years, waiting like a spider.
And us flies crawling along the other
side of the street. He's been fooling us.
He's a fraud!

MR. SPICK — And us afraid of a fraud!

MR. JOUNCE — Now he's come to *us* to be buried, forty
cents, carcass, soul and all! It's our

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- turn now. Away with him! To O'Sullivan's!
- MR. RANSEED — Into the box and off to O'Sullivan's!
- MR. SPICK — Afraid!
- OTHERS — Afraid!
- MR. LEMON — Come and help me, Ryan! (*Mr. Ryan shakes his head.*)—Spick—Ranseed—Jounce—shame on you! Butchers and grocers and fish-men acting so! Is this how you treat a man when he's down? Our Neighbor Woundy! What's Varick Street coming to?
- MR. JOUNCE — Varick Street? Varick Street's come into its own! It's our turn now! Ha, Lemon! We know you too! We've got you at last! You and your flower talk—you're as big a fraud as that body snatcher!
- MR. SPICK — Two of a kind!
- MR. JOUNCE — You've been in league—scheming against us—him with his coffin and you with your weeds!
- MR. SPICK — Neighbor Woundy and Neighbor Lemon!
- MR. RANSEED — We've listened to you two all these years!
- MR. SPICK — Our tongues scared stiff as dead fish!
- MR. JOUNCE — Now you've got to listen to us!
- MR. LEMON — Jounce—Ranseed—Spick—
- MR. SPICK — Shut up, you pink geranium!
- MR. JOUNCE — Or you'll go in the same box with him!
- MR. RANSEED — Go the way the loved ones went!
- MR. SPICK — With grandfather, father—and Woundy himself!

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

Mr. Lemon continues to struggle toward his neighbor, but Mrs. Scrubb slips his wreath around his neck and holds him. Mr. Woundy, no longer resisting, is thrust into the coffin. He disappears with a strange smile.

MR. LEMON — I'll have to get dressed.

MR. JOUNCE — No, you don't—you'll go as you are,
pretty pansy.

MR. LEMON — I'll catch my death o' cold.

MR. JOUNCE — Woundy'll bury you cheap!

MR. WOUNDY — That I will, Lemon.

MR. JOUNCE — Ha, Woundy submits!

MR. SPICK — Woundy capitulates!

MR. RANSEED — Woundy knows his betters!

MRS. SMOCK — We'll carry him gently—as mothers do.

MRS. SCRUBB — Like undertakers.

MR. RANSEED — Like pallbearers.

MR. JOUNCE — And do it cheaper than you—

MR. SPICK — The last of the Woundys!

MR. RANSEED — For forty cents and a tip to the grave-
diggers!

MR. JOUNCE — On to O'Sullivan's!

THE REST — On to O'Sullivan's!

MR. JOUNCE — We'll drink, long life to Varick Street!

MR. WOUNDY — (*from the coffin depths*)—And a long life
hereafter!

Solemn exit—Mr. Lemon led by the women clutching the wreath-collar, followed by the pallbearers—two at the head and two at the foot—carrying the coffin.

CURTAIN

THE SILENT WAITER



A Tragi-Comedy

To Gordon Craig

and

His Marionnettes

THE SILENT WAITER

A Tragi-Comedy

CHARACTERS:

JIM

HAL

THE WAITER

One of the dimly lighted windows of a cafe seen from the street. The rest of the building, and of its environs, in darkness. At the rise of the curtain, the shade of the window is down. Behind it, a distinct murmur of voices:

FIRST — My head's really hot. I've been having too much.

SECOND — Tut, lad. It's not the wine, but this corner we're in. It's getting stuffy.

FIRST — I'll raise the shade—

SECOND — And betray our privacy? (*They laugh quietly.*)

Wait—don't you bother. Let the waiter do it. (*Louder*)—I say there—Waiter! Raise this shade, will you?

Pause. An unseen hand raises the shade. The window is oblong, with the long lines horizontal. It is composed of three panels. In the first and third, two young men are seated in profile. One can only see their heads, torsos and arms. Their chairs and table stand below the lower frame of the window. Most of the significant action which ensues, appertaining to the entrances, pantomime and exits of the men's hands, wine-bottles, glasses, etc., unfolds in the lower half of the middle panel, and in the upper half, as regards the entrances and exits of the waiter. One cannot see his head; it is always higher than the upper frame of the window. The action is vivid, incisive, rhythmical, and

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

symbolical of the given mood or speech. The three men are in conventional evening dress. Jim is framed by the left, Hal by the right panel. Jim is romantic and considerably younger than Hal in appearance, but older, slower, graver in intonation and gesture. His features haven't attained their ultimate outline; Hal's have. His have the air of an ascetic. The scene might be suggested thus:

	WAITER	
JIM	Action of hands, bottles, glasses, etc.	HAL

The waiter turns mechanically and slowly disappears.

JIM — That's better, Hal.

HAL — Rather hot these nights, eh?

JIM — No, it's the wine.

HAL — Maybe something else does it—something not to-night or the wine?

JIM — What do you mean now?

HAL — Give it up?

JIM — Yes, you're cryptic again.

HAL — To-morrow, you turtle!

JIM — Guilty. (*He laughs sheepishly.*)

HAL — Forgotten her so soon?

JIM — Not quite. But after we've talked nothing but Stella, Stella, ever since we came, and to-morrow, tomorrow—

HAL — What then?

JIM — Why—since they're the only two topics I can feel about, think about, talk about—and the two you

THE SILENT WAITER

like most to humor me in—well, it was only
Christian of me to try a new one.

HAL — Why?

JIM — Don't play the innocent. To-morrow's my party,
not yours.

HAL — It'll be mine—outside looking on! (*He laughs joy-
vially.*)

JIM — Drop your eternal banter.

HAL — Why so serious? You've grown positively solemn.

JIM — It's the heat—the wine—to-morrow—hang it, I'm
nervous—it's—

HAL — You!

JIM — Me?

HAL — It's not alone you—but every man the night be-
fore—

JIM — Don't degrade it. You needn't class us with
common—

HAL — There, there!

JIM — Why shouldn't I be solemn?—

HAL — It's your last night—

JIM — What do you mean now?

HAL — Touchy! You know tradition says that the night
before a man marries he shall spend with the
boys—

JIM — Hang tradition—

HAL — And that the boys in this instance—so we agreed—
are concentrated in me?—

JIM — Drown tradition, I say—

HAL — So do I, lad. Fill them up again.

*The bottle, held out by Hal, appears in the middle
panel.*

JIM — Hold on, old man, I've had enough.

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

HAL — But this one's exceptional—iconoclastic—one gulp will do it?

Jim's glass appears reluctantly, wavering a little. The bottle tilts to the horizontal, and then to the upside-down perpendicular.

HAL — Hello—empty! I say, Waiter—another quart—

JIM — No, Hal, no!

Bottle and glass exeunt.

HAL — Make it a pint this time—

JIM — The last—it's getting late—and to-morrow—

HAL — Is near! A pint this time, Waiter.

The waiter appears, bows almost imperceptibly, and disappears.

HAL — A slow old cuss that. And silent. Acts as though he'd lost his tongue.

JIM — (*with sudden animation*)—I say—Hal!

HAL — Yes?

JIM — (*eagerly*)—Am I—really—worthy of her?

HAL — What—again?

JIM — I can't help it. Do you really think I'll—make her happy—and keep her happy—

HAL — Reptition three hundred and sixty-six!—

JIM — I know, old man, but once for all—

HAL — Once for all, Jim, *that* isn't the question! Of course, you'll make her happy, keep her happy—but the real question is—

JIM — What?

To Jim's disgust, the waiter reappears, leaves the smaller bottle, bows as before and disappears.

HAL — Weird fellow that—

JIM — What *is* the question?

HAL — Fill them up first.

THE SILENT WAITER

The bottle and Jim's glass reappear, the glass more unconscious, steadier, than before. Hal fills it; glass and bottle disappear. Soon Hal's filled glass appears—in a direct approach.

JIM — The question?

HAL — Don't look so suspicious. And tradition comes first. Let's get rid of it.

JIM — I'd rather drink to her—as usual.

HAL — Certainly! You intuitive cuss! Stella—the enemy of tradition—let her sink it! Ready?

Jim's glass reappears. The glasses clink.

HAL — To Stella.

They drink—first Jim, quickly and awkwardly, narrowly watched for a moment by Hal—and then Hal, deliberately.

JIM — Now!

HAL — To business, eh?

JIM — Ugly word!

HAL — To work—is that better?

JIM — Much. Begin.

HAL — (*cautiously*)—Lad, I'm older than you.

JIM — (*sullenly*)—I've heard that before.

HAL — I've been through more, suffered more—I know more. Head and heart have finally learned their respective functions. Don't eat each other periodically. Not about love.

JIM — Ha, now I know what made you a recluse—

HAL — Rats!

JIM — No, cats!

HAL — Shut up—where was I?

JIM — On the point of dubbing me, an adolescent ass.

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

HAL — Don't be one now. I'm not talking down. But across the level of this table.

JIM — Why the preamble? It sounds prophetic.

HAL — Ordinarily, it'd be platitudinous, inflated commonplace. Now, it *is* prophetic.

JIM — Moralize, you monk—

HAL — Thanks. Now, the real question—

JIM — Ah yes, the real—

HAL — Jim! Is it your turn to talk, or mine?

JIM — Sorry. Go on.

HAL — Are we or aren't we—friends?

JIM — We are—go on.

HAL — To you, the world—outside of her and me—

JIM — Is an abomination! Go on, will you?

Hal quickly finishes his wine. Jim is leisurely.

HAL — The question isn't will *you* make and keep Stella happy. But will *she* make and keep you—

JIM — What's that?

HAL — Don't flare up again—do you want me to stop?

JIM — Go on.

HAL — You think me a sacrilegious meddler—

JIM — I don't—

HAL — You do—and if you don't, you ought to. Well—it's just this sacred myopia—sacred regard—I won't say you have for Stella so much as men generally have for the woman of their eye—it's this I'm after—that I want to denude—that I want you to see as I do—because it's the most insidious sentimentality, most vicarious poison in the whole human system. It's deadly.

THE SILENT WAITER

JIM — I won't deny it. I wouldn't know how. But
Stella—

HAL — I'm not saying you have it for her—

JIM — I have—and you know it! Don't beat about—
particularize!

HAL — Good! You're a man! Shake!

Hal's hand appears.

JIM — You must have had doubts hitherto—

HAL — Twaddle! Come! It's not the lover or friend
I'm after.

*Jim's hand appears. The hands clasp, and
disappear.*

HAL — Well, Mister Man—

JIM — Thanks—I was sick of the lad—

HAL — Just an affectionate diminutive not usual with us
Americans—

JIM — Shut up and go on!

HAL — Well—you and I and the rest of us have got to
get over the jejune phase of the love mania, and
the sooner the better for biology! Now that we're
particularizing—can you recall the nursery rhyme
which—might be applied—

JIM — To Stella? Ye gods, haven't I said it to her,
ad nauseam? Twinkle, twinkle, little star—

HAL — How I wonder what you are—

JIM — Up above the world so high—

HAL — Like a diamond in the—

JIM — Enough—cut it—it's absurd!

HAL — Not at all. It's profoundly, fundamentally seri-
ous, tragic—whether a Roman say it—*Mica, mica,
parva Stella*—or—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

JIM — Cut the Latin—I've made her suffer that, too!

HAL — She doesn't suffer—on the contrary—

JIM — Never mind—go on!

HAL — You understand, it's this self-prostration I'm after? It's not Stella. I've only the highest regard—

JIM — Hypocrite! There you go yourself! One'd never suspect your regard from your visits. You haven't been to see her alone—without me—well, since you introduced me there—bless you!

HAL — That's another question—quite foreign. You know I never go anywhere—work nights—prefer my studies—my candle. And besides, she's been your preserve, as they say, from that moment to this!

JIM — What do you mean now?

HAL — I don't have to explain. Now, love—love isn't self-annihilation—nor is it altruism—

JIM — You must have loved a bit in your day to talk so fluently now—

HAL — This isn't my day, it's yours—

JIM — (*sighs*)—To-morrow—

HAL — And I'd rather talk fluently than suffer—

JIM — Cynic! So would I. Which one taught you how?

HAL — We'll reserve that roast for another meal—

JIM — That sounds bitter—

HAL — Not at all—it's matter of fact—

JIM — Who was she?

HAL — Are we discussing me or you?

JIM — Me—but—

HAL — Then be quiet. Besides, to-morrow?—

JIM — Is half an hour off—

THE SILENT WAITER

HAL — As to the day—but the event?

JIM — Twenty and a half long, long hours—

HAL — A lightning calculator should see hours equal—

JIM — He doesn't—so hurry—

HAL — Half an hour longer?

JIM — Yes, yes!

HAL — Where was I?

JIM — Altruism.

HAL — Love isn't altruism—far from it. It'd be mighty poor stuff if it were—Nature'd stop it in a jiffy. The best of love—its real innerds—is strictly selfish.

JIM — Hal!

HAL — Isn't it?

JIM — Decidedly no!

HAL — If it isn't, you're not in love. Not with Stella, but with theories!

JIM — *You* are!

HAL — *You* are. We're like two dogs at a bone—

JIM — Sorry—go on.

HAL — Bring it down from the sky—out of the rarefied regions—diamonds don't grow up there. Poetry's as misleading as love—as sorely impregnated with sentiment, and as bewildering. Just why do you want to make and keep her happy?

JIM — Well—

HAL — For yourself, eh?

JIM — No—absolutely—I—

HAL — A man who stutters, lies!

JIM — Hal!

HAL — Jim?

Pause.

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

HAL — Shall we go home?

JIM — No—go on.

Hal laughs gently.

HAL — You admit the charge?

JIM — Don't rub it in.

HAL — Don't look so sour!

JIM — For God's sake, go on.

HAL — Not till you answer—and grin.

JIM — I admit it—

HAL — But you haven't grinned?

JIM — Damn you—there.

Jim grimaces. Hal laughs freely.

JIM — Cut it.

HAL — Since the question isn't that you make Stella
happy, but that she make you happy—

JIM — Oh!

HAL — You admit the former depends on the latter?

JIM — I suppose so.

HAL — That you can't make her happy unless you're
happy yourself?

JIM — No.

HAL — That it takes her to make you happy?

JIM — Yes, yes, but—

HAL — And to *keep* her happy—as you add—she has to
keep you happy—

JIM — Hal! How dare you presume—

He makes an effort to rise.

HAL — Don't be heroic—sit down.

Jim subsides.

HAL — Well?

Jim doesn't answer.

THE SILENT WAITER

HAL — You've thought about it, haven't you? Not a mere brutal premise on my part, is it?

Jim shakes his head.

HAL — And you've not only wondered if she *can* keep you happy—but if she *will*—of her own volition.

JIM — (*laboriously*)—Why do you tell me this to-night?

HAL — I'm not telling it—I'm dragging it out of you—getting you to tell it—not to me, to yourself!

Jim nods.

HAL — So you don't go to church on your knees, and deaf, dumb and blind. I'm brutal because I love you, lad—know you—

JIM — Don't call me, lad.

HAL — I'm brutal to Stella only by implication, and because—

JIM — You don't love her, know her—

HAL — Because I do!

JIM — What's that!

HAL — In you, man, in you!

JIM — Oh!

HAL — I can only speak of her side—generally—

JIM — From your experience with those who taught you to talk?

HAL — Don't be nasty. Resentment's out of place here.

JIM — Sorry—go on.

HAL — And don't be sorry. It puts *me* on a pedestal.

JIM — Go on.

HAL — From my experience—and my observation of others—

JIM — Rotten expression!

HAL — Yes—but we're not botanizing—

JIM — Biologizing!

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

HAL — From what I've felt and seen—is that better?—

JIM — Much!

HAL — Of the regard men have for women—

JIM — A rebuttal?

HAL — Yes.

JIM — Good Lord! That point's no longer in order.
I've conceded it.

HAL — Granted. But losing that illusion—that ballast—
we fall to earth with a bump and rebound back
to the sky —

JIM — Good Lord!

HAL — Where we hear woman's version of the twinkle
ditty sprawling to our stardom.

JIM — You don't know Stella.

HAL — I do.

JIM — See here, Hal! How well do you know her? This
is the second time—

HAL — Never mind—

JIM — Don't say that! I'm not a baby!

HAL — You are when you prattle—

JIM — I'm not prattling. You knew her before I did,
long before—

HAL — Not long before—

JIM — Before

HAL — (*evasively*)—Well?

JIM — See here—how well did you know her? (*Reflec-
tively*) Funny, I've never asked you that? Defi-
nitely? Nor her either! Hal!

HAL — (*lightly*)—Too blind—too dumb—trustful—not
caring a fig about history after you won her—
very early, wasn't it?

JIM — This isn't a mocking matter—

THE SILENT WAITER

HAL — It is—

JIM — Glad to hear it. It's a relief, but—

HAL — And being trustful of me and the rest as soon as
you were sure of her—

JIM — Will you stop?

HAL — Not till I've answered your: Funny, I've never
asked you that.

JIM — Well, you've answered it. Sorry—

HAL — Glad, you mean—

JIM — Glad.

Pause.

HAL — You see how much you want her for yourself?

JIM — We've been through that.

HAL — And how much your so-called wanting yourself for
her is the same thing in the same glass?

JIM — Get back to the sky—this is uncomfortable—

HAL — That's why folk worship. It's easier.

JIM — I'm through with worship.

HAL — Even the semblance of it?

JIM — With the whole of it!

HAL — Good for you! You've graduated—

JIM — From ladism, eh?

HAL — No, from what folk call, manhood!

JIM — Thank God!

HAL — Fill them up again!

JIM — Let's!

Repetition of pantomime of bottle and glasses.

JIM — To manhood, deceased—

HAL — No, Jim—to you—reborn.

JIM — And you, Hal.

HAL — To us then—

JIM — Individually—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

HAL — And together.

They laugh a little, drink, laugh a little.

JIM — Now?

HAL — We're back in the sky—looking down on —adored
by—the women who are foolish.

JIM — But not Stella?

HAL — Not Stella.

JIM — Well?

HAL — A final gulp first to the ladies in question—

JIM — By all means—

HAL — It's a long journey back—

JIM — With many circumlocutions!

HAL — To the ladies!

JIM — The ladies!

They clink and finish their glasses. Hal looks abstracted.

JIM — Well?

HAL — Eh?

JIM — What are you waiting for?

Hal loses more and more of his nonchalance as he proceeds.

HAL — How I wonder what you are!

JIM — Are you drunk?

HAL — No—reminiscing.

JIM — Oh, the nursery—

HAL — Invoking it as a text—

JIM — I thought we were through with that?

HAL — With the man's version—

JIM — And the woman's?—

HAL — The same, but the interpretation's different—

JIM — Different?

THE SILENT WAITER

HAL — Quite a little—decidedly—vastly—

JIM — Stop fishing for words!

HAL — Eh?

JIM — You seem in difficulty—for the first time—be-
fuddled—just as much as we—

HAL — Who?

JIM — Lovers.

HAL — How?

JIM — When women enter!

Hal makes an obvious effort at self-recovery.

HAL — I'm considering them—want to spare them, be nice
to them, gallant—

JIM — Sentimentalist yourself!

HAL — No, I'm poisoning my lance for the attack. These
are mortal lists, and he who wins—man or woman
—is the one with the intricate equipment—

JIM — Go to, Sir Walter!

HAL — Go to, yourself.

JIM — Well?

HAL — (*nervously*)—Hadn't we better have some more
wine?

JIM — Your brain's addled already!

HAL — Woman champion!

Jim bows ironically.

HAL — Now, don't interrupt. I have to feel my way here.

JIM — Why now and not before?

HAL — I have to be impersonal—prate in the plural—

JIM — Don't mind me—use the singular—

HAL — Want to probe my skeletons?

JIM — Whose else can you prate about?—

HAL — (*suddenly*)—You wont mind the revelation?

JIM — Not at all.

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

HAL — (*evasive again*)—You're safe against it?

JIM — Why not?

HAL — Glad to hear it. I'm not.

JIM — Where are you driving now?

HAL — That remains to be seen.

JIM — Confound your cryptomania.

HAL — Double-confound it.

JIM — Well?

They study each other for a moment. Hal breaks the suspense.

HAL — Well—it's like this! Begins like a testament, eh?

JIM — Begin, begin—

HAL — With the world listening?—

JIM — Who cares about a waiter?—

HAL — Oh, is he there?—

JIM — In the next room—he can't hear. But Hal—can this be you? Are *you* afraid of opinion?

HAL — Only lest somebody think I'm spreading a treatise far more imposing than the facts deserve.

JIM — Lord, have mercy—

HAL — There's nothing so stupid to listen to in the whole curriculum of gossip as a man's sex reactions.

JIM — What circumnavigation! Will you ever come to port? I can't find you any more. Where are you?

HAL — Here.

JIM — Who'd know it? Considering it's you—our paragon among ascetics—without flaw hitherto? Have you of all men—a conscience?

HAL — An artistic one. I despise banality.

JIM — Art is its glorification!

HAL — Don't be epigrammatic.

THE SILENT WAITER

JIM — Then save me from it! Will you ever begin?

Hal is nonplussed. Then quickly—

HAL — Jim!

JIM — What's the matter?

HAL — I—can't—

JIM — Can't what?

HAL — Don't look at me—I simply can't—go on with this!

JIM — What can't you go on with?

HAL — This—generalizing. It's stifling—

JIM — Stifling?—

HAL — I've got to come to—the particular—

JIM — Woman?

HAL — Yes.

JIM — Why shouldn't you?—does it—hurt?

HAL — Damnably.

JIM — Hold it back—

HAL — Too late—I can't—

JIM — Wait—I'll call for more wine—

HAL — I don't want wine.

JIM — Then out with it—you can trust me—get rid of
it—we've no secrets from each other—

HAL — That's just the trouble—we have!

JIM — Yes?

No answer.

JIM — Hal!

No answer.

JIM — Look at me—who is it?

No answer.

JIM — Christ—it isn't—

HAL — It—is.

JIM — God help us—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

Jim clutches out and collapses onto the table. One can barely see his head.

HAL — Not us—Jim lad—you.

JIM — (*faintly*)—Me?

HAL — You.

Jim slowly raises his head. His face is wild, haggard. Hal's is ashen—but he again seems master of himself.

HAL — It doesn't exist—now.

JIM — It's past?—

HAL — Past.

Jim straightens himself with the aid of the table.

JIM — That isn't so terrible—if it's over—is it over?—
is it—

HAL — Utterly—

JIM — For good?

HAL — Yes.

JIM — Then what's so terrible?—except that I didn't know before?—but that's not so terrible—(*he laughs huskily*)—is it?—that you never told me? But—Stella?—

HAL — That's it.

JIM — What?

HAL — Can't you see?

JIM — My head's going round—

HAL — Give it a rest—and I'll tell you. I can't—quite—
with you looking at me—

JIM — You haven't gone back on me, too?

HAL — No—nor she—don't say too.

JIM — Is there anything—to be ashamed of? Hal!

HAL — Nothing.

JIM — What then?

THE SILENT WAITER

HAL — (*tenderly*)—It's not hers or mine now—it's just yours—entirely.

JIM — Mine—now—entirely? What is?

HAL — The shock.

A long pause. Jim seems gradually to shrink into himself. His head seeks his arm and the table.

HAL — That's right, try to rest, and I'll tell you. And remember, I'm with you—I'll help—

JIM — (*faintly*)—You will?

HAL — Yes. You're not—alone.

Jim's shoulders move convulsively. But one cannot hear him sob. His hand gropes its way across to Hal's. Hal's other hand reaches out and strokes Jim's head. The convulsions cease.

HAL — Shall I tell you?

JIM — Yes.

HAL — I want to help you—not alone because I want to—but because I've got to.

JIM — What good—will that do?

HAL — Lots.

Pause.

JIM — For God's sake—don't be silent—say something!
Hal strokes him further.

HAL — Is that better?

JIM — It helps me to think—my head's whirling—that's better—never mind now—let's be men.

Hal smiles sadly and stops stroking Jim.

HAL — May I hold—

JIM — Yes—a little longer—you'll have to—I can't let go yet.

HAL — We're together in this?

JIM — Individually—and—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

HAL — Good—you remember the toast!

JIM — You're a brick—

HAL — Kind of hard, eh?—

JIM — And soft.

HAL — Bless you.

Pause.

JIM — Go on now. I can stand it.

HAL — Sure?

JIM — Yes.

HAL — (*quietly*)—Not being a Christian—I'm not blaming anybody. Remember that, will you, all through?

JIM — Yes.

HAL — Stella—never belonged to me.

JIM — No?

HAL — (*growing more and more pensive as he proceeds—
Jim less and less attentive*)—In the superficial acceptance of such phrases, one could say, she loved and belonged to me—but in reality, she never did. She belonged to herself, loved herself. That isn't peculiar. What I mean is—she loved what she thought me to be—craved that—and not finding me to be what she thought—loved what she insisted I must be—demanded it of me. I tried, of course, but couldn't keep it up. I'm not superhuman. To be what she wanted, I had to be more than myself—had to lie. Even lies have their limit. So I burst—dropped in her regard from what she thought and demanded down to what she could, in justice to either of us, no longer think or demand. I was thrown aside like a used glove.

JIM — Dear old Hal. She didn't understand you.

HAL — Love in such a case has nothing to do with understanding the other fellow. It has solely to do with self-understanding—with self-imagining and self-adventure the means—towards self-expression, the ultima Thule. One sets forth on such a quest expecting to find not only what one sets forth to see, but anticipating thrilling encounters not bargained for. One can't return from such a quest. One must continue it to the death, or try a new one.

JIM — (*dazed*)—Is that where I?—

HAL — We'll come to you later. At the start, I was as much the adventurer as she. I loved what I thought her.

JIM — Worship?

HAL — Self-prostration to star-exaltation—worship and deception—center and circumference.

JIM — Even you?

HAL — You don't recover from a disease till you've had it?

JIM — No.

HAL — In my case, however, when I didn't find her what I asked her to be—

JIM — Dear girl—

HAL — I somehow compromised—or thought I did—tried to—between that and what she actually was. I came as far around to her as it's possible for one being to come to another after an infection of worship. But even a recovery from such an infection leaves one exhausted, crippled. In her case, there could be no compromise, because her worship of me—her prostration—was directed—if anything so nebulous can be directed—to herself. She didn't crave the ideal man so much as

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

she did some hypothetical creature which should supersede her, as suppliant, to herself, as star, so that she might be the latter, solely, freely, untrammelled. This required a supernatural agency on the part of the man of her choice. Somehow, I was able to be, I was elected—that choice—but try as I would, I couldn't fill out her portrait of the priest.

JIM.— How quietly you tell it!

HAL — I can now—I couldn't have then. I was in the midst of elements then—an atom driven, whirled, knocked down, broken, pieced together, lifted again—with the whole round over for another series of concussions experience could never brace me against. She was always the one clear image outside the tornado—always slightly reproachful—but otherwise somewhere aloof from it all—a thing on a stone—as still as the stone—a part of it—seemingly the stone herself—but for that almost imperceptible frown. At the last, she was a cool god who has no further concern with a disturbance after the act of pushing it away, like a meteor, with his finger-tip. Even his frown vanishes.

JIM — (*in awe*)—Is—that—Stella?

HAL — (*with oblivious rapture*)—One had to admire such a mechanism even when one suffered most—the moment of the tiny impact—the moment before the crash of destruction. However, that's over. I haven't suffered since.

JIM — Quiet, you mean?

HAL — Quiet's a pretty good name for it.

JIM — So am I.

THE SILENT WAITER

HAL — What do you mean?

JIM — I don't know. It's queer. Go on.

HAL — Have you been listening?

JIM — As closely as I could.

HAL — I see.

JIM — Don't mind me.

Jim withdraws his hand; Hal doesn't prevent him.

HAL — (*as before*)—It was an everlasting round of give, give, on my part. And each thing given, soon tossed away with no more effort than a gesture, always beautiful to see. And always followed by that imperceptible sign of reproach—the great goad—the quick lightning—its tip, the obliterating bolt. The give, give—less and less a part of me, more and more an act inspired by what she held me up to, drove me on with, struck me down. And so, with my degrees of sheer exhaustion coming more and more frequently and uncontrollably—I was soon empty—after only a few weeks of such a pace—empty of what she held me up to. I retreated to my real self—as a reinforcement—no, not even to that, for my real self had fallen deformed, hunchbacked, spineless. It was no longer the original I'd brought her—no longer a force to depend on. I needed an army, not a cripple. And even had it been my old self—an army if ever there was one!—strong, glad, mountain-climbing defence-destroyer that it was!—she had received its service. Repetition would have revolted her.

JIM — Stella!

HAL — These were always the moments when she was

truly oblivious, most pitiless. When the imperceptible flashed to the perceptible. A little giving on her part—the shadow of a compromise—

JIM — She never gave?—

HAL — No. A little giving in the form of a foolish caress—not necessarily felt by her—would have been the torch to revive me enough to make still one more effort to pursue her star-chase for her. But I wasn't an atom worth helping—not in her cosmos. From her view—up from the depths of her—consciously or sub-consciously—she was right.

JIM. — Can you say that?

HAL — Yes, dispassionately.

JIM — What—am I—to say?

HAL — (*unheeding*)—I confess—I wasn't so pleasantly philosophical at the time. It wasn't flattering to my ego. To learn that I wasn't loved for myself—for what I had to give—for not even a particle of either—that was merely humiliating. But when I couldn't supply what she wanted—a self she demanded I be and give—self of her self—it was annihilating. It left me dazed, dumb, stupid, useless. Old Doctor Travel, himself, couldn't cure me. Cured me of the suffering, yes—but not of the stupor. Even now-a-days, fully two years later—when I sit up there nights in my tower—the cell only you are permitted to visit—I begin wondering—I go over it all again—do it unawares—it catches me like a shadow—comes in like a ghost and takes me—while I'm reading a book—pondering another man's thought—it comes between me and him—as though corporeal things

THE SILENT WAITER

didn't exist—only essences of things once corporeal—to which I'm recalled. The stupor deepens. The very room is enveloped by it—is gone. And I fancy that not even I—am sentient.

Hal's face has undergone the change he describes.

JIM — Hal!

HAL — And I wonder—if I can—whether my conclusions are a result of so much cogitation—airy theorizing—or an outcome of the stupor out of which nothing concrete can ever come again—beyond further stupor and further speculation.

Jim sits up. His expression is one of terror.

JIM — Hal—Hal!

Hal smiles.

HAL — Well? I'm not afraid. I can go on with it.

JIM — You're not—you can—but what of me?

HAL — (*sobering to the former situation*)—You? Jim? Oh
yes—

JIM — You did—what I'm still doing—

HAL — Yes, lad.

JIM — Went through it—it's over with you—but with
me?—

HAL — With you—Jim—it's—

He falters.

Jim hides his face in his hands.

JIM — Why did you—tell me—to-night?

HAL — Are you sorry?

JIM — (*with a supreme effort*)—No.

HAL — Resentful?

JIM — No.

HAL — What then?

JIM — I feel—so frightfully—alone—lost.

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

HAL — I'm here.

JIM — But you—can't take her place. Stella! Stella!
He once more seeks refuge in his arms.

HAL — (*gently*)—Nobody can take her place. Not even you.

JIM — It's all so—desperate. To-morrow's—gone—and the next day—all days! Why—did you—tell me?

HAL — To save you, as it's called, and to—

JIM — You think this saves me? It may save me *against*—but what does it save me *for*—(*he sits up*)—What for, eh?
His tone is menacing.

HAL — Yourself.

JIM — What am I to do with that?—what good is it now?—it's dead—it couldn't be any use to her—and being no use to her, what do I care about it?—it's nothing to me—it's worth throwing away, that's all—before it was ever used—like yours!

HAL — You know it was used. Richly, gloriously.

JIM — But not like yours—it never got so far. There *were* reproaches—there still are—but not like yours. You got silent ones—the kind a god would get—or even a man—I get actual ones—chiding—the kind a child would. I was used all right—richly and the rest—so I thought before you began. I've been to mountain peaks and sky places, but not like yours. She's never goaded me higher. I'm not worth goading higher. I'm a—

HAL — That was on the way, Jim. And you're not a child—neither was I—you were younger—that's

THE SILENT WAITER

all. You needed more suffering first—apprenticeship—further maturing—and then!—

JIM — Stella compromised! I'm her compromise!

HAL — Nothing of the sort. You're simply the new quest leading to the same old jungle. I've been seeing it right along—since I got back—in you yourself. Not at first—not for some time—but in our last few meetings—your growing uncertainty—your hidden cancer breaking out in moroseness—that haunted look you never had before—sprite that you were! I could see by its greater frequency just what she was thinking and doing—her motive and method—how high her thought of you flew—how much quicker and sharper the goad.

Jim has sunk to a stupor.

I could see the whole plot more and more clearly—saw it as I sat here—saw it beyond further need of seeing. Not so many weeks ago—the first gloom I encountered—the first sign of that look—that beginning of a paralysis as sure of its victim as death—proved it to me—more clearly than if she had proclaimed it herself: This is he—this the one—this henceforth mine! Are you listening?

JIM — Trying to.

HAL — Do you need a final proof?

JIM — Yes—for God's sake—

HAL — The so-called courtship was a long one?—

JIM — I don't have to tell *you* that—

HAL — But the engagement itself—the announcement—sudden?

JIM — You know that too—

HAL — And the wedding cards—close after—still more so?

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

JIM — (*reviving*)—Yes! Yes! (*with frantic joy*)—Hal!
Is that it?

HAL — Yes. You were ordained at last. Your novitiate
over—your priesthood begun.

JIM — (*with clutching eagerness*)—Was that how it hap-
pened—

HAL — (*warily*)—With me? Yes. But much earlier—
almost the moment we met. But it didn't last
long. I told you that. We never got to your—
to-morrow.

JIM — (*gloomy again*)—There you are.

HAL — Where?

JIM — (*hopelessly depressed*)—Yours had a beginning—at
once—and an ending. A life and death—a full
eternity.

HAL — You envy me?

JIM — Yes!

HAL — Despite being able to see you'd have gone the way
I did?

JIM — Even so—even more so! I might have gone
further—

HAL — No, Jim. Don't try to deceive yourself there.
You can't.

JIM — But think of what I've lost! Who cares about
suffering?—what of that?—God give me that—
rather than this!

HAL — It can't be—

JIM — Thanks to you! Of course it can't! Not with
me—not very far! But did you have to stop me?
Why did you bring me here? What devil made
you pick on to-night?

HAL — (*tenderly*)—*Her* devil.

THE SILENT WAITER

JIM — (*dangerously*)—Could *you* do such a thing?—do you hate her now?—was it revenge?

HAL — (*bluntly*)—Don't invoke the villain. Such words aren't in my line.

JIM — They are—in your smooth way—you may have other words for them—but they're the same—the motive behind them the same! Didn't you bring me here?

HAL — Yes.

JIM — Didn't you get me to drink?—

HAL — That's nothing new—

JIM — And then tell me all this—in a slow, sneaking way? Didn't you have trouble telling me? You didn't tell me at once?

HAL — Fire away.

JIM — You were hiding it—hiding something—you might have told me before—months ago—before you took me there—

HAL — Yes.

JIM — But you didn't?—

HAL — No.

JIM — You—

HAL — Stop!

Their glances meet. Hal's is the steadier.

Jim looks away, grief-stricken.

JIM — Sorry—Hal.

HAL — Don't. You had to have your storm. Had to hit somebody. I had mine—only worse.

Jim shakes his head.

JIM — Storms are no use. Not now.

HAL — They are. (*Jim shakes his head again.*) Now we can think.

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

JIM — What good's thinking? It hasn't done you any.

HAL — Not yet.

JIM — When will it?

HAL — (*significantly*)—Mighty soon.

JIM — When?

HAL — Thinking eventually leads to action—

JIM — When?

HAL — When men—do it.

Jim looks quickly at Hal. And as quickly away

HAL — You see?

JIM — Yes.

HAL — Am I wrong?

JIM — No.

Hal thrusts two fingers into his vest pocket.

Deliberately, he takes out a phial and holds it at attention. Jim spies it; Hal lowers it.

JIM — Christ!—What's that?

HAL — Action.

JIM — What—now?

HAL — Yes.

With a groan, Jim gropes for the table.

HAL — You're not—afraid?

JIM — (*brokenly*)—No—but I hate—to go—

HAL — Alone?

JIM — Yes.

HAL — You'll not go—alone.

JIM — Hal!

His hand leaps out. Hal catches and holds it. Their heads are close.

JIM — Then you still—love her?

HAL — Yes.

JIM — The—impossible?

THE SILENT WAITER

HAL — Unattainable.

JIM — And without it?

HAL — There's nothing.

JIM — Like me?

HAL — Yes.

Pause. Jim leans back. So does Hal.

JIM — Tell me.

HAL — Yes?

JIM — Why'd you not think of this—then? Why did
you—

HAL — Wait?

Jim nods.

HAL — It may sound heroic—fishy—

JIM — What?

HAL — (*with intensive monotone*)—That I did it for her.

JIM — This waiting?

HAL — Yes.

Jim stares at him, searches his face, gently withdraws his hand.

JIM — Then—it—is—

Hal smiles and shakes his head.

JIM — Why'd you wait so long—take me there first—and never go there yourself—without me—and even that only a little? And keep silence so long—let us two go so far—wait until the very last?—

HAL — I said—for her—

JIM — Yes, but in Christ's name—why?

HAL — That she—so to speak—might learn—have time to learn—that in losing me, dropping me—she was losing herself.

JIM — By why now—why not then?

HAL — She needed proof of the same order—a recru-

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

descence of the search and discovery—that her love for a man is love of herself.

JIM — Me?

HAL — Yes.

JIM — Why me?

HAL — Because you're the only other thing I loved—the only other I could regard worthy the lesson she needs and deserves.

JIM — I was worthy of her?

HAL — Yes.

Jim smiles.

JIM — Thanks.

HAL — You see?

JIM — I think so—

HAL — That losing us both—she'll learn—

JIM — What love is?—

HAL — Yes.

JIM — But suppose she doesn't—even after us—suppose it isn't in her?

HAL — I think it is. If it isn't—well, the gods have erred again.

JIM — I'm sure it's in her. But—

HAL — Yes?

JIM — The experience—oh how I envy the man!—will go to—

HAL — One we needn't begrudge!

JIM — No?

HAL — Wont we be a part of their world?

JIM — The stars?

HAL — The earth.

JIM — I see.

Hal smiles. So does Jim.

THE SILENT WAITER

JIM — Let's order another bottle—

HAL — Pint?—

JIM — No, quart this time—

HAL — We wont need a quart?—

JIM — Only a sip! Trust you for that!

They laugh quietly.

HAL — Well?

JIM — This one's on me!

HAL — Agreed.

JIM — I say there—Waiter—Waiter! Is the fellow gone deaf?

HAL — No—but he must be dumb. Here he comes.

The waiter reappears.

JIM — Another pint, please.

The waiter turns away.

HAL — One moment. Will you bring the bill with you?

The waiter bows and goes.

HAL — He hears all and says nothing!

JIM — How do we settle?

HAL — That item's almost our last. We'll pay him right away—

JIM — Have you any other debts?

HAL — No—have you?

JIM — None.

HAL — Solvent, eh?

JIM — Trial balance!

They laugh.

JIM — And our feudal estates?—bonds?—holdings?—

HAL — Such as they are?

They laugh.

JIM — We haven't made our wills—

HAL — True—but let's not deprive our relatives, in the

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

order of legal precedence, of the fun of hunting drawers—

JIM — Poor Aunt Emily—what a shock!

HAL — Nobody much to fight for my books—except rats.

JIM — Hal!

HAL — What's wrong now?

JIM — How about her? To think I could forget—

HAL — Don't flare up again. You haven't forgotten. In an experience like this—so utterly new—we're bound to bungle a bit—

JIM — But think of her, think of her—to-morrow—waiting!—

HAL — We won't be crude, melodramatic—though we do cheat society of a piquant denouement—and the reporters—

JIM — Good Christ—stop!

HAL — Stop yourself. We've got to consider these last behests—with an eye to logic, not hysteria.

JIM — But what of her?

HAL — It'll be a crash, of course. But the more so the better. The sooner her self-love will shatter. And the sooner that happens—

JIM — Yes?

HAL — The sooner her new era will have its chance.

JIM — God help her to it quickly.

HAL — I'm with you.

Pause.

JIM — But how to forestall to-morrow? How'll she understand?

HAL — We'll send her a line. She'll see.

JIM — Telegram?—

HAL — That'd be brutal.

THE SILENT WAITER

JIM — How then?

HAL — We'll indite the line here and send it by messenger—

JIM — Can we get one here?

HAL — Yes. Why not our friend?

JIM — Which friend?

HAL — The waiter.

JIM — Are you crazy?

HAL — Why not? He's probably a night waiter—though I've never seen him before. He may be new here—he's so slow and awkward—he must be. If he's on duty nights, he's off during the day. Why not ask him?

JIM — If you're sure he can be trusted?—

HAL — It's a child's job. And we'll tip him handsomely. He'd go to Walla Walla for that. Withered though he is.

JIM — Here he comes, slower than ever.

HAL — With his obsequious air.

The waiter reappears—with the new bottle and the bill.

HAL — Set that down and give me the bill.

The waiter obeys. Hal reaches down into a trouser pocket.

JIM — Hold on—this last bottle's mine.

HAL — That's at the bottom. One peso.

JIM — I'm getting off easy this time.

HAL — Your treat next inning.

They laugh, and pay the waiter. He bows.

HAL — Here's something for your trouble.

The waiter takes the tip, bows again and turns.

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

HAL — One moment.

The waiter stops.

HAL — Are you a night waiter here?

He bows.

HAL — You're off during the day?

He bows.

HAL — In the morning?

He bows.

HAL — Evidently you're not deaf? That wont hurt you any. Dumb though, eh? That's it then—well—you wont hurt anybody else much, will you? (*To Jim*)—Got a smile out of him that time—didn't I, Waiter?

He bows.

HAL — Listen. We want you to do a very particular errand for us. Will you?

He bows.

HAL — That's a good chap. We want you to take a letter for us—as early in the morning as you can—say, not later than noon—can you then?—

He bows.

HAL — To a certain party—not very far from here. You're sure you can do it?

He bows and holds out his hand.

HAL — It isn't ready yet. You'll have to come back for it. In ten minutes or so—at the end of this bottle—we'll call you.

He bows.

HAL — We'll look after you snugly. Does that intrigue you?

He bows.

HAL — All right, sir. Don't forget.

THE SILENT WAITER

The waiter bows and goes.

HAL — Queer, eh?

JIM — Yes.

HAL — A most appropriate and satisfying agent.

JIM — You're queer yourself.

HAL — Why not? This is delicious. One might as well enjoy it while one has it?

JIM — To the dregs.

Hal laughs.

HAL — We may not reach the dregs this time.

JIM — One little sip, eh?

HAL — One little one.

They laugh.

JIM — Well?

HAL — You're ready?

Jim nods.

HAL — The note first.

JIM — Oh yes. What shall we say?

HAL — One line enough?

JIM — Three stark monosyllables!

HAL — Excellent!

JIM — What do we write on?

HAL — I've thought of that.

JIM — That too? Ye gods!

Hal takes an envelope from his coat pocket and hands it to Jim.

JIM — Addressed! What a man!

He removes the paper.

HAL — That part's yours.

JIM — Thanks.

HAL — Got a pen?

JIM — No.

HAL — You'll never do! You're criminally careless!

He pulls out a fountain-pen and holds it out to Jim. Jim takes it, writes a little awkwardly, and then stops and studies the paper.

HAL — Have you signed it?

Jim signs quickly and passes paper and pen to Hal. Hal signs with a careful hand. They lean over the paper.

HAL — Looks nice, eh?

JIM — Yours is firmer than mine—more practiced—

HAL — But yours is more—what shall I call it?—vision-ary?

JIM — Call it—blind.

They lean back. Hal puts the letter into the envelope, which he seals and lays on the table with a banknote.

JIM — A ten-spot? That'll help him find the letter!

HAL — And now?

JIM — Fill them up—no, wait—let me do it this time.

HAL — Your hand steady?

JIM — Watch me. How much?

HAL — All the way as usual.

They laugh. Hal holds out his glass. Jim's boast isn't vain, although he pours a little too much.

HAL — You've spilled some over—

JIM — Will that hurt now?

They laugh. Jim fills his own glass.

HAL — Didn't pour too much that time!

JIM — No! Second trial!

HAL — What's that mean?

JIM — Nothing.

Jim holds out his glass to Hal's.

HAL — You're in a hurry.

JIM — Why not?

THE SILENT WAITER

HAL — The situation waxeth redundant?

JIM — Ad nauseam.

HAL — Mustn't spill that, eh?

JIM — No.

Hal opens the phial and pours several drops into Jim's glass, and then into his own. He raises his glass; so does Jim. Roguery flickers at mouth corners.

HAL — Any toast?

JIM — Several.

HAL — Plural, eh?

JIM — Plural.

HAL — Better say them all in a row?

JIM — Much better.

HAL — Will you give them?

JIM — No, you.

HAL — Let's take turns.

JIM — All right—begin.

HAL — After you, Jim.

JIM — Thanks, Hal.

Slowly, somewhat after the fashion of a ritual, but with exquisite cheerfulness, they take turns intoning and echoing toasts, between each of which, their glasses caress, rather than clink.

JIM — To Stella—

HAL — To Stella—

HAL — To—a twinkling star—

JIM — To a twinkling star—

JIM — To—the whole sky—

HAL — To—the whole sky—

HAL — To the earth—

JIM — To the earth—

JIM — Twinkle—little glass—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

HAL — Twinkle, little glass—

HAL — To—her—

JIM — To—her—

Pause.

HAL — Any more?

JIM — Yes, just one.

HAL — What is it?

JIM — (*with an effort*)—To—him.

HAL — Good for you, old man. To him!

Pause.

HAL — Shake.

They shake hands simply.

HAL — So long—

JIM — So long—

HAL — Better luck next time—

JIM — Same to you.

They let go, and smile—a little tremulously.

HAL — Ready?

JIM — Yes—God bless you—

HAL — And you.

The glasses clink this time. Jim raises his quickly—Hal his slowly. Hal watches Jim. They nod to each other. Jim starts to drink, without hesitation. The glass topples from him. Jim falls forward. Hal nods—shakes his head—and then follows Jim. One cannot see them. A longer pause. The waiter appears as before—in the same slow, mechanical way. He bows—no, leans forward—and stretches his hand up to the shade. In so doing, he bends over, and his head comes into view for the first time. It is (if it isn't a hallucination)—a death's head. The head disappears as the shade is slowly drawn down over the window. Curtain.

MONDAY



A Lame Minuet

*To Six Ladies Bloom—
who each loves her man—
notwithstanding—*

MONDAY

A Lane Minuet

THE CHARACTERS

MRS. JONES

MRS. BROWN

MRS. SMITH

MRS. MEEK

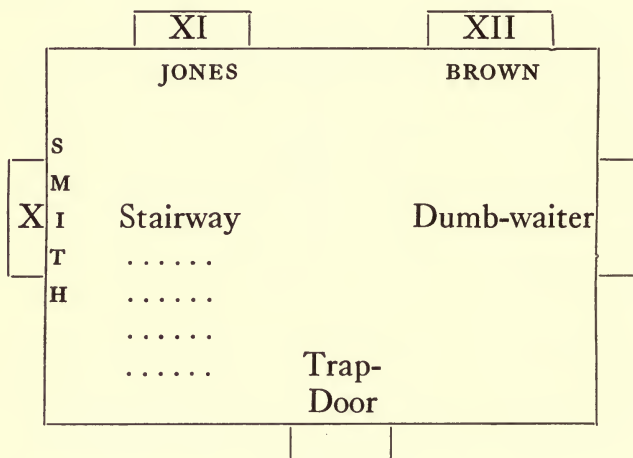
MRS. SNUB

MRS. WEEDS

One of the box-like landings of a New York tenement. There are three apartment doors—one in the left wall, two in the rear—and a dumb-waiter door in the right. Nothing distinguishes the apartment doors, one from another, except three cell-like numerals and three sur-names—X, XI, XII—and Smith, Jones, Brown. A bannister connects the stairway to and from the floor below with the stairway to and from the floor above. Naturally, the stairway below the level of the onlooker's eye cannot be seen; when somebody comes up onto the landing, he does so—head, torso, legs, feet—through an imaginary trap-door, passes across the front of the scene and ascends the other stairway to and through an imaginary trap-door in the ceiling. Coming down from the floor above and going down to the floor below, the sequence is perforce in the contrary order of feet, legs, torso, head. The carpenter should construct the visible stair-

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

way along narrow lines, with generous spaces between each step, and place it at the extreme left of the scene, so as to obstruct the view of the onlooker as little as possible. The fourth wall, front, is not in the least opaque. One must, as it were, and for the sake of what transpires, be able to see through it.



While the play moves to a sort of folk prose there is an undercurrent rubato apprehending an amorphous minuet or scherzo movement in which the persistent voices of Mesdames Jones, Brown and Smith provide the main themes and the interrupting voices of Mesdames Meek, Snub and Weeds, the trios. The characters indulge a deal of unconscious turning about and posturing in the suggestion of a forgotten minuet. The steps are uneven, tentative—because one has forgotten the music, cannot quite recall it, even though one would like to. Moreover, one's partner is absent. Try beating the lines in three-quarter or preferably, six-eighth time. If you are ignorant of the fact, history will ad-

wise you that the scherzo has superseded the minuet. Still better, throw away baton and history, and attend the literal present . . .

Mrs. Jones emerges from Apartment XI. She is very tall and very thin. She carries a pail to the dumb-waiter shaft. The pail is tall and thin. Garbage bulges out. Mrs. Jones puts down the pail and opens the dumb-waiter door. As she gropes for and grasps the rope, most of her is hidden. The dumb-waiter can be heard bumping the sides of the shaft. Mrs. Brown emerges from Apartment XII. She is very short and very stout, and of course her pail as well. Mrs. Jones' voice is soprano, Mrs. Brown's bass.

MRS. BROWN — Good morning to you, Mrs. Jones.

MRS. JONES — Good morning yourself, Mrs. Brown.

Mrs. Brown sets down her pail and mops her face with her apron. The up and down motion of Mrs. Jones and the grunt of the rope beat time to the ensuing speech.

MRS. BROWN — It's you that's here first this time.

MRS. JONES — It is, but that's not to my credit.

MRS. BROWN — Let me give you a hand, I'm stronger.

MRS. JONES — I'm leaner—it's easier for me.

MRS. BROWN — Indeed, holes like that should be bigger,
or ropes like that nearer for women
like me.

MRS. JONES — It's a man-sized job this pulling and hauling away like a seaman asail.

MRS. BROWN — Men are softies these days, it's a woman's.

MRS. JONES — It is when a janitor's a loafer.

MRS. BROWN — Think of his lazy hide—

MRS. JONES — Down below on a chair—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

MRS. BROWN — With his back to the boiler—

MRS. JONES — His feet on the furnace—

MRS. BROWN — His pipe in his mouth—

MRS. JONES — His hands in his pockets.

MRS. BROWN — Men are women these days, I'm telling
you.

MRS. JONES — My very own husband is one, I'll confess.

MRS. BROWN — I'm telling you more—it's my husband
too.

MRS. JONES — Letting frail women do grown men's
work—

MRS. BROWN — While they straddle chairs on trucks or in
banks!

*Mrs. Jones has stopped pulling. Mrs.
Brown joins her. They shout derision down the shaft.*

MRS. JONES — Hey there!

MRS. BROWN — Mr. Binns!

MRS. JONES — Mr. Janitor!

MRS. BROWN — Mr. President!

*Except for the echoes—silence. Mrs. Smith
emerges from Apartment X followed by two small children
carrying bundles and empty milk bottles. Her person and
pail are a genial compromise between the person and pail,
respectively, of Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Brown.*

MRS. SMITH — Good-morning, ladies.

OTHERS — Good-morning, Mrs. Smith.

MRS. SMITH — What's all the to-do?—

MRS. JONES — About nothing—

MRS. SMITH — Nothing?—

MRS. BROWN — Men—

MRS. SMITH — What men—?

MRS. JONES — Husbands in general—

MONDAY

MRS. BROWN — Janitors in particular—

MRS. SMITH — Oh!

MRS. JONES — You agree—?

MRS. SMITH — I most certainly do!

MRS. JONES — Women need one another these days.

MRS. SMITH — You were here first this time, Mrs. Jones?

MRS. JONES — I was, Mrs. Smith—

MRS. SMITH — Let me give you a hand—

MRS. JONES — Thanks, but it's up now—

MRS. SMITH — I'd have been here myself, but I'm washing—

MRS. BROWN — I'd have been here too, but I'm washing myself—it's that makes me sweat like a stoker.

MRS. SMITH — I've these small creatures besides, yanking at me, like thread on a spool.

The children huddle behind her.

MRS. BROWN — Luckily mine are grown up and at school.

MRS. JONES — Lucky you two to have any at all.

MRS. BROWN — Don't talk, Mrs. Jones.

MRS. SMITH — Your time will come—

MRS. BROWN — And you not say, lucky—

MRS. SMITH — A man's more than enough—

MRS. JONES — He's that after Sunday—

MRS. BROWN — With the next day Monday—

MRS. SMITH — Wash-day and what-not—

MRS. JONES — Tubs hotter than cinders—

MRS. BROWN — Steam thicker than devils—

MRS. SMITH — The very saints would melt in!

MRS. JONES — I put mine off as long as I can—

MRS. BROWN — There's less washing for you—

MRS. SMITH — That complain being barren.

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

MRS. JONES — Yes, but I'm thinner, I've got to go slower—heat makes me thinner faster than you.

MRS. BROWN — You're to be envied—

MRS. SMITH — Not to be pitied!

Mrs. Jones lifts her pail with both hands.

OTHERS — Can I give you a hand?

MRS. JONES — Thank you—I'm used to this.

She lifts the pail onto the dumb-waiter.

MRS. BROWN — Think of the pails that thing takes.

MRS. SMITH — Three families on a floor—

MRS. BROWN — And each of them large—

MRS. JONES — Except mine—

OTHERS — Lucky you!

MRS. JONES — (*emerging*) — Each pail stuffed like a goose—

MRS. SMITH — And families like mine with more than one pail—and bottles and bundles and boxes besides.

MRS. JONES — The smell of that stuff—
no matter the food—
is ever the same—who's next?

MRS. BROWN — After you, Mrs. Smith—

MRS. SMITH — You were second, Mrs. Brown—

MRS. BROWN — But you have the children—

MRS. SMITH — Brats—

MRS. JONES — Darlings—

MRS. SMITH — Where are you, you two?

The children suddenly appear, rush to the dumb-waiter, deposit the bundles and bottles, reappear, and then rush back into Apartment X.

MRS. JONES — Happy they—

MONDAY

MRS. SMITH — Unhappy me—

MRS. JONES — One looks so like its mother,
the other so like its father—

MRS. BROWN — Equally blessed—

MRS. SMITH — Unequally damned—

MRS. BROWN — I get what you mean—

MRS. JONES — I don't, Mrs. Brown—

MRS. SMITH — You will, Mrs. Jones—

MRS. BROWN — And now, Mrs. Smith?—

MRS. SMITH — After you, mam!

Mrs. Brown encounters considerable difficulty with the performance of pail and dumb-waiter.

OTHERS — Can I give you a hand?

MRS. BROWN — Not at this job—it helps me reduce—
bending and stretching squeezes out fat—

MRS. SMITH — You're not that—

MRS. BROWN — Thanks, Mrs. Smith.

She emerges with a profound sigh. Mrs. Smith has moderate difficulty with the rite.

MRS. SMITH — This stuff, as you say, has its smell, Mrs.
Jones—

MRS. JONES — Its stench, I should say—

MRS. BROWN — Fine words don't improve it—

MRS. SMITH — And no matter the food—

MRS. JONES — One can't grow used to it.

MRS. BROWN — What was your Sunday dinner?

MRS. JONES — Roast ham, apple sauce,
potatoes and peas—

MRS. BROWN — Roast lamb, caper sauce,
potatoes and beans—

MRS. SMITH — Roast beef, brown gravy,
potatoes and squash—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

- MRS. JONES — And dessert?—
- MRS. BROWN — And dessert—
- MRS. SMITH — And dessert!
- MRS. JONES — All three were good dinners—
- MRS. BROWN — All three meant much labor—
- MRS. SMITH — All three meant more garbage.
- MRS. JONES — What's the good of a Sunday?
- MRS. BROWN — It's the day of rest—for a man—
- MRS. SMITH — The hardest day for a woman—
- MRS. JONES — Except Monday—
- MRS. BROWN — The day of retribution.
- MRS. SMITH — No matter the meat, the greens, the
sweets—
- MRS. JONES — Monday's the same and smells the same—
- MRS. BROWN — But the bigger the meat, the greens, the
sweets—
- MRS. SMITH — The heavier the load of the pails and pails.
- MRS. BROWN — And the day of clothes to wash—
- MRS. JONES — Where's it all come from?
- MRS. SMITH — And the day of dust to sweep—
- MRS. JONES — Where's it all go?
- MRS. BROWN — And of sewing and mending—
- MRS. SMITH — What good's it all do?
- MRS. JONES — With next Monday the same, and the
next!
- MRS. BROWN — A woman's an angel—
- MRS. SMITH — Sewing her wings—
- MRS. BROWN — Mending her husband's.
- MRS. JONES — If it wasn't for Sunday—
- MRS. BROWN — Monday'd be lighter—
- MRS. SMITH — If it wasn't for his bigger dinner—
- MRS. JONES — Monday's garbage'd be smaller—

MONDAY

MRS. BROWN — It's not the children—

MRS. SMITH — So much—

MRS. JONES — As the men—

MRS. BROWN — It's the men—

MRS. JONES — As you say—

MRS. SMITH — We all say!

Mrs. Smith looks from behind the door.

The three exchange nods.

MRS. SMITH — Anything else to go down?

OTHERS — No, blessed be the Lord—

MRS. SMITH — Be the devil!

Mrs. Smith begins to lower the dumb-waiter. As before, the metronome.

OTHERS — Can I give you a hand?

MRS. SMITH — Going down's easier.

MRS. BROWN — God's grace on that!—

MRS. JONES — Saves us marching down—

MRS. SMITH — Garbage indeed is less evil than food—

MRS. JONES — That we march up
one flight, two flights, three—

MRS. BROWN — Long, heavy flights—

MRS. SMITH — Though it might be all four—

MRS. JONES — You're an optimist, mam—

MRS. SMITH — Well, mightn't we be?—

MRS. JONES — The women above?—

MRS. BROWN — Mrs. Meek, Mrs. Snub, Mrs. Weeds?

One more flight would reduce me complete—

MRS. JONES — Three are enough for a woman that's thin—

MRS. SMITH — With her arms clutching bundles—

MRS. BROWN — Three, maybe four times a day!

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

MRS. SMITH — It's the men ought to do it—

MRS. BROWN — They sitting in offices—

MRS. JONES — On top of trucks—

MRS. SMITH — Or on stools chopping tickets!

MRS. BROWN — Yours still chopping?—

MRS. SMITH — Yes—yours still a clerk?—

MRS. BROWN — Adding sums any fool could add—

MRS. JONES — And mine drives his truck—

with his clay in his month—

MRS. BROWN — Like our janitor—

MRS. SMITH — Who ought to be down below—

MRS. JONES — Pulling the rope for you—

MRS. SMITH — Blessed be—there's an end—

MRS. JONES — Even to ropes—

MRS. BROWN — To hanging!

MRS. SMITH — It's the men!

OTHERS — It's the men!

Mrs. Smith comes out and shuts the door.

She faces the others, arms akimbo. They imitate her.

Pause.

MRS. SMITH — Shall I tell you a secret?

They draw closer.

OTHERS — Tell us.

MRS. SMITH — Can you keep it?—

MRS. BROWN — Like an oyster—

MRS. JONES — A clam.

MRS. SMITH — My man's no longer content—

with the food I feed him—

that I climb our stairs with—

prepare for him, cook for him—

lay under his nose!

MRS. BROWN — That's no secret—

MONDAY

MRS. SMITH — Eh?

MRS. JONES — That's just like mine—

MRS. SMITH — Mine says yesterday—
sweet-like and cute-like—
'Do they slaughter nothing now
but beef at the butcher's?'

MRS. BROWN — Mine was still cuter,
perking and piping up—
'What's become of
chickens and geese—
have they grown out-of-date?'

MRS. JONES — 'You don't have to prove
to my palate'—says mine—
'that a pig has disguises—
I know them as well
as I know you, my dear!'

MRS. SMITH — They're a trio—

MRS. BROWN — They're that—

MRS. JONES — They'd go in a choir—

MRS. SMITH — They're good enough—

MRS. BROWN — Innocent—

MRS. JONES — The cherubs!

MRS. SMITH — What'll we do about them?

MRS. BROWN — What'll we do?

MRS. JONES — What'll we do?

MRS. SMITH — Do you know of anything?

MRS. BROWN — Do you?

MRS. JONES — Do you?

MRS. SMITH — Have you thought about it?

MRS. BROWN — Have you?

MRS. JONES — Have you?

MRS. SMITH — Not by myself—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

MRS. BROWN — Nor I—

MRS. JONES — Nor I.

MRS. SMITH — But now that there's—

MRS. BROWN — Three of us—

MRS. JONES — Three of us—

MRS. SMITH — We can put our heads together—

MRS. BROWN — Come closer—

MRS. JONES — Yes, closer—

MRS. SMITH — And fix them—

OTHERS — Fix them.

MRS. SMITH — Anybody'd think my man's an alderman—

MRS. BROWN — Mine's a congressman—

MRS. JONES — Mine's a senator—

MRS. SMITH — With five thousand a year—

MRS. BROWN — Ten—

MRS. JONES — Twenty!

MRS. SMITH — What'll we do about them?

MRS. BROWN — What'll we?

MRS. JONES — What'll we?

MRS. SMITH — Do you know of anything?

MRS. BROWN — Do you?

MRS. JONES — Do you?

MRS. SMITH — Sh!

OTHERS — Sh!

MRS. SMITH — There's somebody—

MRS. BROWN — Coming up—

MRS. JONES — The stairs!

They separate stealthily and retreat to their doors. A woman gradually comes up through the trap-door. She carries several small bundles.

MRS. SMITH — Ah, Mrs. Meek—

MONDAY

- OTHERS — It's only Mrs. Meek—
MRS. MEEK — Yes, only me.
They gather about her.
MRS. SMITH — Still climbing mountains?—
MRS. BROWN — Or golden stairs?
MRS. MEEK — I'm trying to catch up—
MRS. JONES — With your vision of God?—
MRS. MEEK — My sight of food prices!
TRIO — Oh!
MRS. SMITH — Set down your bundles and rest.
MRS. MEEK — I need no rest from these—they're little.
MRS. BROWN — They don't look over heavy.
MRS. MEEK — Bologna, salad, rolls, tea.
MRS. SMITH — What may they be for?
MRS. MEEK — My lunch and my man's
after washing and sweeping—
TRIO — Ah!
MRS. MEEK — Bundles used to be bigger—
when my man had his job—
lugging hod up skyscrapers.
MRS. SMITH — He's still out of sky-work?
MRS. BROWN — Lets you do the housework?
MRS. JONES — Lets you tramp up and down stairs?
MRS. SMITH — In and out of closets?—
MRS. BROWN — Out of stoves?—
MRS. JONES — Out of tubs?
MRS. MEEK — He has to—
TRIO — Has to?—
MRS. MEEK — He's still sick a-bed—
TRIO — Oh!
MRS. MEEK — That's how he lost his job—
TRIO — Of course.

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

- MRS. MEEK — Got the lumbago and all—
MRS. SMITH — I see—
MRS. BROWN — To be sure—
MRS. JONES — Just so.
MRS. MEEK — My boy has a job—
but what they pay him
doesn't pay prices—
pays them one day—
but the next day can't—
they've jumped up again—
MRS. SMITH — Out of sight—
MRS. BROWN — Now you see them—
MRS. JONES — Now you don't.
MRS. MEEK — I says to the grocer—
MRS. SMITH — The thief—don't I know him?—
MRS. MEEK — And to the baker—
MRS. BROWN — Don't I know that deceiver?—
MRS. MEEK — And to the fishman—
MRS. JONES — That back-sliding crab!—
MRS. MEEK — What's to become of us all
with you all poking up prices?
MRS. SMITH — What did they say?—
MRS. BROWN — What blarney?—
MRS. JONES — What gas?
MRS. MEEK — What's to become of us all
with you all unable to pay them?
MRS. SMITH — That's nice of them—
MRS. BROWN — Sweet of them—
MRS. JONES — Thoughtful.
MRS. MEEK — It's hard enough for us
to get stuff to sell,
let alone you, mam, to buy it.

MONDAY

- MRS. SMITH — Doesn't it grow any more?
MRS. BROWN — Are the cows all dead?
MRS. JONES — The grass all gone?
MRS. SMITH — The earth quit sending up greens?
MRS. BROWN — The sea up fishes?
MRS. JONES — The trees down fruit?
MRS. MEEK — They don't say that—
MRS. SMITH — They don't, eh?—
MRS. BROWN — Don't they?—
MRS. JONES — The dears?
MRS. MEEK — But they do say—
MRS. SMITH — They do, eh?—
MRS. BROWN — Do they?—
MRS. JONES — The lambs?
MRS. MEEK — Sugar's two cents higher to-day—
MRS. SMITH — Butter's three—
MRS. BROWN — Eggs four—
MRS. JONES — Cheese five—
MRS. MEEK — Milk—
MRS. SMITH — Yes, milk—
MRS. BROWN — Yes, yes, milk?—
MRS. SMITH — For milk we'll have to—
MRS. BROWN — Go back to our own—
MRS. SMITH — If we have any left—
MRS. JONES — Any children to nurse—
MRS. BROWN — That aren't grown up—
MRS. JONES — Or have any coming!
MRS. MEEK — It's not alone climbing stairs—
MRS. SMITH — It's climbing shopkeepers—
MRS. BROWN — And consider the stuff
they're so good as to sell—
MRS. JONES — Skimpy here—skimpier there—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

- MRS. SMITH — Little meat on it—
MRS. BROWN — Mostly fat—
MRS. JONES — Mostly bones!
MRS. SMITH — And shall *we* tell *you*, Mrs. Meek?—
MRS. MEEK — What, Mrs. Smith?—
MRS. SMITH — The secret?—
MRS. MEEK — The secret?
MRS. SMITH — Lumbago or no lumbago—
MRS. MEEK — Lumbago or no lumbago?—
MRS. SMITH — It's our husbands—
we have to climb!
MRS. MEEK — Husbands?
TRIO — Husbands!
MRS. SMITH — If they weren't so lazy—
MRS. MEEK — (*indignantly*)—Mine isn't that!—
MRS. BROWN — So good for nothing whatsoever—
MRS. JONES — But lounging on chairs—
MRS. SMITH — Or lying in beds—
Mrs. Meek draws away and starts for the stairs.
MRS. MEEK — How dare you?
MRS. SMITH — We dare anything—
MRS. BROWN — Everything—
MRS. JONES — And then something!
MRS. SMITH — Run along, Mrs. Meek—
MRS. BROWN — There's but one more flight—
MRS. JONES — You're not far from Heaven—
MRS. MEEK — What are you up to?
MRS. SMITH — We'll tell you some time—
MRS. BROWN — Come and see us to-morrow—
MRS. JONES — Or Wednesday—
MRS. SMITH — You wont find us climbing husbands—

MONDAY

MRS. BROWN — Nor they climbing us—

MRS. JONES — Nor children either.

Mrs. Meek begins to edge up the stairs.

MRS. MEEK — Are you daft?

MRS. SMITH — No, mine's an alderman—

MRS. BROWN — Mine a congressman—

MRS. JONES — Mine a senator—

MRS. SMITH — But you wont see us—

MRS. BROWN — Climbing presidents—

MRS. JONES — Or kings—

MRS. SMITH — Or emperors!

MRS. MEEK — Good morning!

MRS. SMITH — Good morning—

OTHERS — Mrs. Meek!

*Mrs. Meek vanishes. Mesdames Brown
and Jones consult Mrs. Smith.*

MRS. BROWN — What *are* we up to?

MRS. JONES — Yes, what are we?—

MRS. SMITH — That woman's soft—

MRS. BROWN — Of course, but—

MRS. JONES — To be sure, but—

MRS. SMITH — She's one of your faithful—

MRS. BROWN — One of your doting—

MRS. JONES — One of your knee-benders—

MRS. SMITH — She hasn't the blood—

MRS. BROWN — The backbone—

MRS. JONES — The spine—

MRS. SMITH — To go on strike!

MRS. BROWN — On strike?

MRS. JONES — On strike?

MRS. SMITH — Like us women!

MRS. BROWN — Us women?

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

MRS. JONES — Is that what we're up to?

MRS. SMITH — Isn't it?

MRS. BROWN — (*doubtfully*)—I suppose so—

MRS. JONES — Suppose so.

MRS. SMITH — (*aggressively*)—Well?

OTHERS — Well?

MRS. SMITH — What's happened to you?

OTHERS — To us?

MRS. SMITH — Have you pulled in your horns?

OTHERS — N—no.

MRS. SMITH — Then why do you stand there—
like apes—like frogs?—

MRS. BROWN — Apes?—

MRS. JONES — Frogs?—

MRS. SMITH — Doing nothing—

OTHERS — Nothing?—

MRS. SMITH — With your mouths open—

OTHERS — Open?—

MRS. SMITH — Open—saying—nothing!

OTHERS — Eh?

Pause. The two mouths actually open and say nothing. Mrs. Smith explodes with ironic oratory.

MRS. SMITH — It's not my husband's name I've taken—
I was a Smith when he took me from
home—

his cousin—if you must know.

MRS. BROWN — What does—

MRS. JONES — That mean?

MRS. SMITH — It means that the Smiths
are more plentiful
than the Browns or the Joneses—
it means that the Smiths

MONDAY

rule America—
it means that the Smiths
don't give in to anybody—
don't crook their knees
to kings or to presidents—
it means that the Smith woman—
the bravest in Christendom—
doesn't turn yellow for any man—
not even her husband!

OTHERS —

Oh!

MRS. SMITH — It means the Browns do—

MRS. BROWN — It doesn't!—

MRS. SMITH — It means the Joneses do—

MRS. JONES — It does not!—

MRS. SMITH — Mister Brown, the congressman—
your little clerk with his little figures—
figures he adds for a boss—
minus the miserable wage he pays—

MRS. BROWN — Worse than miserable—

MRS. SMITH — That clerk airs himself—

MRS. BROWN — Like a prime minister—

MRS. SMITH — Him roasting what you set before him—
calling for chickens and geese
when it's ham you yanked from
the oven—burning yourself to cinders!
him with his wage—
it's that makes it ham—not chicken!—
him lifting his nose—
you bending yours!

MRS. JONES — And mine—

my Mister Senator—
him gracing a truck all day,

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

with nought but a horse
as dumb as himself to drive—
fancying himself higher than Cæsar—
on five dollars a day!—
him expecting me
to show him squab
and pheasant and quail
on five dollars a day
and no sign of a raise!

MRS. SMITH — You see, Mrs. Brown?—

MRS. BROWN — Of course I see—

MRS. SMITH — Mrs. Jones does—

MRS. BROWN — Of course she does—

MRS. SMITH — She's smarter than you—

MRS. BROWN — She's not!—

MRS. SMITH — Much!—

MRS. BROWN — Not much!

Mrs. Brown squares off. So does Mrs.

Smith.

MRS. BROWN — Well, mam?

MRS. SMITH — You'll do.

MRS. BROWN — Much obliged.

MRS. JONES — How about me?

MRS. SMITH — You too.

MRS. JONES — Much obliged.

MRS. BROWN — But how about you?

MRS. SMITH — Who?

MRS. BROWN — You, Mrs. Smith?

MRS. SMITH — How dare you?

MRS. BROWN — (*hotly*)—I dare anything—everything!—
how about you and your talk—

MONDAY

talking like a lord over me and Mrs.
Jones?—

what about you and your man—

him with his alderman gait—

on a ticket-chopper salary—

what about that—will you please tell us
that?

MRS. SMITH — Eh?

MRS. BROWN — How about you feeding him on that?—

we don't talk big, we talk small—

you ask us what we're up to—

now it's us asking you—

a Brown of the tribe of Brown—

it's me asking you—

a Smith of the Smiths—

rulers of the earth—

what are you going to do?—

tell us two—

Mrs. Jones of the Joneses—

not rulers of the earth—

and me of the Browns—

not even rulers of Avenue A—

what are you going to do

that we can't do? Anything?

MRS. SMITH — Well.

MRS. JONES — Well?

MRS. SMITH — I've got to think about it.

OTHERS — So?

MRS. SMITH — I haven't thought of anything yet.

OTHERS — Oh!

MRS. SMITH — Have you?

MRS. BROWN — Have we?

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

MRS. JONES — Have we?

MRS. BROWN — That's grand—

MRS. JONES — Impudent!

MRS. SMITH — This only came up to-day—

MRS. BROWN — And it'll come up
to-morrow and Wednesday,
Thursday and Friday,
Saturday, Sunday—

MRS. JONES — And Monday again!

MRS. BROWN — They'll scratch it on your gravestone—

MRS. SMITH — What'll they scratch?—

MRS. BROWN — That when you get through
lifting your garbage on elevators—
which you do very nicely—
and get through jawing us—
which you do nicer still—
trying to get us to strike—
to turn against our husbands—
leave them—jilt them—who knows?

MRS. SMITH — Mrs. Brown!

MRS. BROWN — You'll crawl back to cell number ten,
and your washing, dusting, sweeping,
cooking, setting table, scrubbing,
making your beds and unmaking them—

MRS. SMITH — Mrs. Brown!

MRS. BROWN — Without so much as a chirp or a whimper—

MRS. SMITH — Madam!

MRS. BROWN — Madam?

MRS. SMITH — You're a liar!

MRS. BROWN — So are you!

*Mrs. Jones, whose reach is fortunately
much longer than her neighbors', interposes as they close.*

MONDAY

MRS. SMITH — I'd have pulled your hair out—

MRS. BROWN — I'd have pulled yours could you spare it—

MRS. JONES — Ladies!

MRS. SMITH — Your rats would come out—

MRS. BROWN — Your wig would come off—

MRS. JONES — Ladies!

*Whether from exhaustion, or from lack of
further initiative or invention, the ladies desist.*

MRS. JONES — I'm ashamed of you—

MRS. SMITH — So am I—

MRS. BROWN — Same here—

MRS. SMITH — Sorry—

MRS. BROWN — Sorry myself.

MRS. JONES — We'll never conquer this way—

MRS. SMITH — Not together—

MRS. BROWN — Nor separate.

MRS. JONES — The men will rule us all our lives—

MRS. SMITH — And all other women—

MRS. BROWN — The rest of creation.

MRS. JONES — Women have never stuck before—

MRS. SMITH — Not very long—

MRS. BROWN — Not long enough.

MRS. JONES — Men stick together—

MRS. SMITH — Like fleas—

MRS. BROWN — Like lice.

MRS. JONES — That's how they prevail—

MRS. SMITH — They're cute—

MRS. BROWN — Sly—

MRS. JONES — Exactly!

MRS. SMITH — Now, Mrs. Jones?

MRS. BROWN — What do you say?

MRS. JONES — Let me see.

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

MRS. SMITH — Have you got it?—

MRS. BROWN — Let's have it!—

MRS. JONES — Not yet—just a moment.

OTHERS — Oh!

MRS. JONES — Let me think—

MRS. SMITH — Wait—

MRS. BROWN — Don't think yet—

MRS. JONES — Why?

MRS. SMITH — There's somebody else—

MRS. BROWN — Coming—

MRS. JONES — Up?

The women retreat as before. Another woman comes up through the trap-door. In some slight variation, she is better dressed than Mrs. Meek, and carries larger bundles. She passes in front of the others, nods a little and—

MRS. SNUB — Good morning.

TRIO — Good morning, Mrs. Snub.

She starts up the stairs.

MRS. SMITH — What's your hurry?

MRS. SNUB — No special hurry.

MRS. BROWN — Is your man home already?

MRS. SNUB — Mr. Snub never comes before noon.

TRIO — Oh!

MRS. SNUB — You'll excuse me—

I haven't done my washing yet—
and with Mr. Snub coming—

MRS. JONES — You've got to hurry—

MRS. SNUB — You see?

TRIO — We see.

MRS. SNUB — Good morning.

TRIO — Good morning, Mrs. Snub.

MONDAY

Mrs. Snub vanishes. Open-mouthed pause.

- TRIO — Mister—Snub!
- MRS. SMITH — Did you ever hear—
the like of that?
- MRS. BROWN — Did you ever behold—
such airs?
- MRS. JONES — She sweeps by—
like a lady no less—
- MRS. SMITH — A witch—
- MRS. BROWN — On a broom!
- MRS. JONES — She's got climbing to do—
- OTHERS — Like us—
- MRS. JONES — A floor higher!
- MRS. SMITH — And washing to do—
- OTHERS — Like us—
- MRS. SMITH — Just as filthy as ours!
- MRS. BROWN — And cooking and garbage—
- OTHERS — Like us—
- MRS. BROWN — Yet she—gives herself—airs!
- MRS. SMITH — She thinks living above us
is being above us—
- MRS. BROWN — That next to the roof
is next to the sky—
- MRS. JONES — Next to God.
- MRS. SMITH — Shall I tell you—
- MRS. JONES — The secret?
- MRS. BROWN — Do, Mrs. Smith!—
- MRS. JONES — Mrs. Smith, do!
- MRS. SMITH — You know that her man's a bank clerk?—
- OTHERS — Yes—
- MRS. SMITH — That he works in the neighborhood?—
- OTHERS — Yes, yes—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

- MRS. SMITH — That that's why he comes—
MRS. BROWN — At noon—
MRS. JONES — Like a lord?—
MRS. BROWN — That's it?—
MRS. JONES — Is it?—
MRS. SMITH — It most certainly is!
Reflective pause.
MRS. BROWN — Isn't one clerk like another?
Isn't mine one as much as hers—
though mine's a bill and hers a bank?—
MRS. JONES — And is a clerk
higher than a driver?—
MRS. SMITH — Or a ticket chopper?—
MRS. BROWN — It's not I—would say so!
MRS. SMITH — But she—
MRS. JONES — Her ladyship—
MRS. SMITH — She'd—
MRS. JONES — Say—
MRS. BROWN — So!
MRS. SMITH — A bank's an institution—
MRS. JONES — With tons of money in it—
MRS. BROWN — More than anywhere else—
MRS. SMITH — But what's Mr. Snub got to do with it?—
MRS. JONES — It's not his—
MRS. BROWN — It's the bank's—
MRS. SMITH — The stockholders'—
MRS. JONES — The depositors'!
MRS. SMITH — Though I and my man
haven't a bank account—
OTHERS — Not I and mine—
MRS. SMITH — How should we?—
OTHERS — How?—

MONDAY

- MRS. SMITH — The money in banks
belongs to depositors—
poor folk richer than us—
- MRS. BROWN — Not to bank clerks—
- MRS. JONES — Nor to bank clerks' ladies
who give themselves airs—
- MRS. SMITH — Pass us on the stairs—
- MRS. BROWN — Bow—
- MRS. JONES — And say, good morning.
- MRS. SMITH — One'd think him—
upstairs in an attic—
if you please—
- MRS. BROWN — God—
- MRS. JONES — Almighty—
- MRS. SMITH — Himself—
- MRS. BROWN — And her—
- MRS. JONES — Misses—
- MRS. SMITH — God—
- MRS. BROWN — Almighty!
- MRS. JONES — My man's no senator—
though he is a truck driver—
but he's my man—
and as good as any other.
- MRS. SMITH — Better, Mrs. Jones—
- MRS. BROWN — Miles better—
- MRS. JONES — Thanks—so are yours—
Mrs. Smith—Mrs. Brown!—
- MRS. SMITH — Alderman or no alderman—
- MRS. BROWN — Congressman or no congressman—
- MRS. SMITH — Chopper or no chopper—
- MRS. BROWN — Clerk or no clerk—
- MRS. JONES — Your men—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

- MRS. SMITH — Are miles better—
MRS. BROWN — Than hers.
MRS. SMITH — Do we give ourselves airs about it?
OTHERS — No!
MRS. SMITH — But we don't—do we—
look down on ourselves for it?
MRS. BROWN — I should say—
MRS. JONES — Not!
MRS. SMITH — Not that we're proud—
of cooking and garbage—
MRS. BROWN — Washing and ironing—
MRS. JONES — Sweeping and dusting—
MRS. SMITH — Or complain—
MRS. BROWN — Or grumble—
MRS. JONES — Or balk—
MRS. SMITH — Or praise our husbands for—
MRS. BROWN — For—
MRS. JONES — For—
MRS. SMITH — Their low wages—
MRS. BROWN — Or high wages either—
MRS. JONES — Praise them or blame them—
MRS. SMITH — Or blame them so much—
that it's them
that give us
our cooking and garbage—
MRS. BROWN — Washing and ironing—
MRS. JONES — Sweeping and dusting—
MRS. SMITH — But at the same time—
MRS. BROWN — And other times—
MRS. JONES — All times—
MRS. SMITH — Let's be careful—
MRS. BROWN — Careful—

MONDAY

MRS. JONES — Ever so careful—
MRS. SMITH — This might be a trap—
MRS. BROWN — A snare—
MRS. JONES — The devil behind it—
MRS. SMITH — That woman the bait—
MRS. BROWN — The bacon—
MRS. JONES — The cheese—
MRS. SMITH — And us the lure—
MRS. BROWN — The victims—
MRS. JONES — The mice!
MRS. SMITH — So let's think about—
 what we've been thinking about—
MRS. BROWN — Go straight on—
MRS. JONES — Thinking about it—
MRS. SMITH — And not be easy on men—
MRS. BROWN — Overlook their faults—
MRS. JONES — Their sins!
MRS. SMITH — But—
OTHERS — But—
MRS. SMITH — Well, I don't know—
OTHERS — You don't?—
MRS. SMITH — Do you, Mrs. Brown?
MRS. BROWN — Let me think—
MRS. SMITH — You, Mrs. Jones?—
MRS. JONES — Let me!
MRS. SMITH — Well?
MRS. BROWN — Wait!
MRS. JONES — Wait!
MRS. SMITH — Sh!
OTHERS — What's that?
MRS. SMITH — Somebody's—
MRS. BROWN — Coming?—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

MRS. JONES — Up?

MRS. SMITH — Down!

They retire again. A woman comes slowly down the stairs. She is in mourning. The trio retire still farther. Slow colloquy.

MRS. SMITH — It's you—Mrs. Weeds?

MRS. WEEDS — Yes.

MRS. SMITH — Wouldn't have—known you at first.

MRS. BROWN — Where are you—bound for?

MRS. WEEDS — The florist.

MRS. JONES — How sad.

OTHERS — So sad.

MRS. SMITH — I only—heard about it—

MRS. BROWN — Last night—

MRS. JONES — My man—saw the crepe—

MRS. SMITH — In the—vestibule—

MRS. WEEDS (*passing before them*) — Yes?

MRS. SMITH — Was it—

MRS. BROWN — The influenza—

MRS. JONES — Got him?

MRS. WEEDS — Yes.

MRS. SMITH — How terrible—

MRS. BROWN — It's everywhere—

MRS. JONES — These days—

MRS. WEEDS — Yes?

MRS. SMITH — When—will it be?

MRS. WEEDS — Wednesday morning.

MRS. SMITH — So sad.

OTHERS — So sad.

MRS. SMITH — May I—

MRS. BROWN — Can I—

MRS. JONES — Could I—

MONDAY

MRS. WEEDS — Thanks, friends, nothing.

MRS. SMITH — Couldn't we—

MRS. BROWN — Send up—

MRS. JONES — Some flowers?

MRS. WEEDS — Yes.

TRIO — Thanks.

Mrs. Weeds descends slowly and vanishes.

The trio have grasped door knobs. Whispered colloquy.

MRS. SMITH — She's got—

MRS. BROWN — Nobody—

MRS. JONES — Now.

MRS. SMITH — Not a soul—

MRS. BROWN — To look—

MRS. JONES — After.

MRS. SMITH — Poor man—

OTHERS — Poor man—

MRS. SMITH — Poor woman—

OTHERS — Poor woman.

Mrs. Smith comes forward excitedly. So do the others. Quickened tempo.

MRS. SMITH — There's poor Mr. Weeds gone—

MRS. BROWN — And poor Mr. Meek—

MRS. JONES — Down with lumbago!

MRS. SMITH — And it was only last night—

my man had such a cough—

MRS. JONES — I could hear him through our wall—

MRS. SMITH — There's no knowing—

what'll happen to a man—

with the draughts he sits in on stations —

MRS. JONES — A man on a truck—

with the wind blowing—

every which way—

PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS

MRS. BROWN — Or a man—
indoors all day—
getting no air whatever—
swallowing dust—germs—

MRS. SMITH — The poor—

MRS. BROWN — Poor—

MRS. JONES — Dears!

MRS. SMITH — What'll we do?—

MRS. BROWN — What'll we?—

MRS. JONES — What?

MRS. SMITH — Let me think—

MRS. BROWN — Let me—

MRS. JONES — Me!

They stop—look at each other—stare. Suddenly, from each apartment, the sound of a buzzer.

TRIO — What's—that?

MRS. SMITH — Must be—

MRS. BROWN — Mr. Binns—

MRS. JONES — And the dumb-waiter.

MRS. BROWN — Who'll go?—

MRS. JONES — I've the chills—

MRS. BROWN — The creeps—

MRS. SMITH — I'll go.

Mrs. Smith, followed by the others, goes to the dumb-waiter door and opens it. With evident relief, she shouts down the shaft.

MRS. SMITH — Oh—Mr. Binns—a little higher!

The rope creaks.

MRS. SMITH — That'll do—

MRS. BROWN — The dear man—

MRS. JONES — He's always there—

MRS. SMITH — So dependable!

MONDAY

They take their pails, shut the door and retreat, rather than go, towards their apartments.

MRS. SMITH — I must get to my washing—

MRS. BROWN — And then run down stairs—

MRS. JONES — For—my man's dinner!

MRS. SMITH — What are you having to-night?

MRS. JONES — Chicken—or goose—or something!

MRS. BROWN — At such prices?

MRS. JONES — Mr. Jones pays them—

MRS. SMITH — So does Mr. Smith—

MRS. BROWN — And Mr. Brown—no matter—

MRS. JONES — How high—

MRS. SMITH — They go!

MRS. BROWN — And I'll—

MRS. JONES — Cook them—

MRS. SMITH — Broil them—

MRS. BROWN — Roast them—

MRS. JONES — Fry them—

MRS. BROWN — Hash them—

MRS. SMITH — Stew them!

MRS. JONES — Sundays!

MRS. BROWN — Or Mondays!

MRS. SMITH — Or—Tuesdays!

They chuckle—nod—and vanish.

CURTAIN



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